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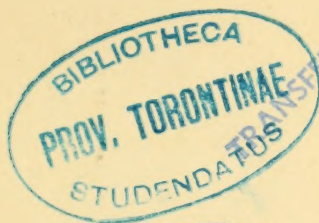


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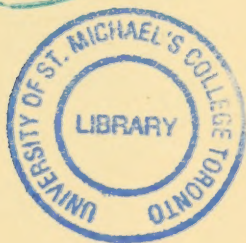
To Dear Father
Jack Lockwood C. Ss. R.
from his old Pastor
L. Forget

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HOLY COMMUNION

By MONSEIGNEUR DE GIBERGUES

Bishop of Valence

From the French of the Thirteenth Thousand

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PREFACE

HOW are we to speak worthily of Holy Communion?

Is there a subject on which the human tongue is more powerless to say anything that approaches the reality? A subject which impresses one more strongly with the need of adoration rather than of speech?

St. Bernard declared himself unworthy and incapable of writing well upon the love of God. And is not Communion the ever-burning hearth, the ever-living spring of the divine love? Is not Communion the act of Jesus giving Himself wholly to us, in order to transform us into Himself and to become one with us?

You, then, who read these pages, summon all the most loving faculties of your soul, appeal to all that is most generous and tender and strong in your heart, so that you may come to understand something of the ineffable prodigies of the divine love.

God said to Moses, when He spoke to him from the burning bush: "The ground on which thou treadest is holy: loose thou thy sandals." The table on which Jesus, full of love, comes to you is holy. To approach it, purge yourself of all profane thoughts, of all earthly emotions, of all idle imaginings, of all guilty affections! May the Spirit which proceeds from the Father

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and from the Son descend upon you as it descended upon the Saviour by the Jordan, to open your mind to the sublime and inaccessible truths that you are about to consider, and fire your heart with all the ardour of the Seraphim on high, and the still greater love of the Most Holy Mother of Jesus !

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CHAPTER I

UNION AND UNITY. DOUBLE NATURAL COMMUNION

“ That they also may be one in us.”—*St. John* xvii. 21.

THEOLOGY teaches us that the Eucharist has three aspects: in the tabernacle it is a mystery; on the altar, a sacrifice; at the Holy Table, a sacrament. In these pages the Eucharist will be regarded only as a sacrament. We will speak only of Holy Communion.

There is nothing in spiritual life more sublime than Holy Communion; nothing that more profoundly influences the soul; therefore there is nothing which it is of more importance to consider.

On the part of God Communion is truly the supreme effort and the consummation of His love; it is the gift pre-eminent among all, which contains and surpasses all others.

As for us, Communion is the source and origin of the supremest graces; and the saints are agreed in stating that one Communion well made is enough to sanctify a whole life. Communion, in fact, is not only the greatest of the sacraments, it is above all the centre and the source of all the sacraments, since it contains, not merely a certain

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grace for a certain determined end, but the very Author of grace, Jesus, the beginning and the substance of all holiness.

It is therefore clear that if the faithful received Communion as often as the Church desires—and in recent decrees, of which we shall speak later on, the Church has expressed a positive desire to see this sacrament received more and more frequently—and if, moreover, they were to communicate well, they would as a result gain countless advantages and great increase of holiness.

Communion is therefore of all subjects the most important; it is above all others; it is in a supreme degree relevant to the glory of God, the good of the Church, and the salvation and progress of souls.

Let us at the outset consider for a moment the fundamental idea of communion, namely, union and unity. Do not be afraid, in passing, to look into the philosophy of the matter; you will quickly be rewarded by the light which will be shed upon the subject, and the resulting impulse to your faith and piety.

Communion signifies union with, the union of this with that, of one person or thing with another. And in order that there may be union between two persons or things there must also be unity; it is when this unity is accomplished that there is union.

Place two portions of wax over the fire in a ladle; in a moment you will see only one portion: unity has resulted; the two portions are united, fused into one.

A number of persons are assembled in a salon.

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One of them speaks, saying aloud what he thinks; the others listen. There is unity of thought, and therefore, in this connection at least, a momentary union of minds.

And if it happens that all judge and feel alike, we say that they are united in judgment and feeling. If finally they come to a decision together, we say that their will is united.

Thus unity of thought, judgment, feeling, and will has resulted in a perfect union between them.

From this we see that union and unity do not exclude plurality, since a number of persons, while remaining distinct, may be united by common bonds.

To ensure peace, happiness, and prosperity in a family, a city, or a nation, union and unity must reign; without which there would be disorder and division, anarchy and ruin.

What is true of a family, a city, or a nation is also true of every masterpiece, whether picture, statue, monument, poem, or tragedy.

In what consists the splendour of a church? In the unity of lines in its construction. Consider a Gothic cathedral. All the columns rise together, soaring in the same direction; they are united in one magnificent effort, as though to lift the building to the skies! Unity of movement makes the union and harmony of the whole.

It is thus with every work of art. Unity—union; there is the indispensable foundation and the essential source of all beauty.

Such also is the source and the foundation of all existence and of all life.

All that exists, all that lives, has at least a certain unity. Without a minimum of unity nothing could exist.

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Examine a stone, a fragment of wood or iron; in each you will find unity. So soon as unity loses its force the object immediately loses its properties. A stone of which the parts are disunited is merely dust.

On the contrary, when unity increases the object gains. As we ascend in the scale of living creatures we find a more and more perfect unity.

The vegetable has more unity than the mineral; the latter is rather a juxtaposition of molecules than a unity properly so called.

But in a plant the root, the stem, the branches, the leaves, the flowers, the fruits, all are one structure; the same sap circulates throughout. The vegetable surpasses the mineral in unity, and therefore in beauty and in life.

With the animal kingdom unity becomes still more perfect; but also beauty becomes greater, and life is of a higher order. We may sever a plant and make two of it. The unity of the plant is not such as to be incompatible with division. It is no longer so when we come to the animal. Unity is essential to his existence and to his life.

And in us how much greater is this unity ! Although the body and the soul differ absolutely in their nature, they are so inseparably united that in each of us there is actually but one person, namely, " I." That which is done by my body is done by me; that which is done by my soul is done by me. I am one being only, formed of two substances.*

* Alas ! how far we are still divided in ourselves ! Divided in our bodies: the elements of death incessantly warring against the elements of life. Divided in our souls: there good and evil wage perpetual conflict.

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In the angel there is a still greater unity than in man, for the angel is composed of one single substance only.

Finally, God is perfect unity; unity of nature and substance, in the plurality of persons and attributes.

We say: "The Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Ghost is God; I believe in one God."

In the same way there are in God different attributes; power is not wisdom; wisdom is not love; immutability is not immensity; immensity is not eternity. But all these attributes proceed from one single nature. It is the unity of nature, of substance, which makes the union of persons and attributes.

This unity, the unity of God, is richest, most overflowing with life and activity, and yet most single, indivisible, and perfect; the type, the origin, and source of all unity, and therefore of all existence and all life. The closer the soul draws to the unity of God and participates therein, the higher will it be raised by that participation in the scale of beings, and the nobler and more fruitful will its life become.

As a matter of fact all beings participate to a certain degree in the divine unity. God is

In proportion as we advance in virtue unity increases, producing harmony and moral order. In the souls of the saints unity and beauty become ever greater. The holiest souls none the less contain some sources of division; St. Paul himself laments it.

But as soon as the soul has left this world all is different; all division becomes impossible; unity is perfect and final. The souls in purgatory are already fully united in themselves, being for ever united with God. What shall we say of the elect in heaven?

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present in each one of us, and each of us receives from Him his degree of unity and of life. Without this presence of God no being could exist.

What a subject of meditation for a Christian is this communion of the universe with God ! What a source of holy and fortifying thoughts is this presence of God in all creation !—of God communicating to every creature His unity and His life ! St. Ignatius has made this one of the essential points in the meditation terminating his “ Exercises ”—their summit and crowning beauty—entitled by him, “ Contemplation for the Purpose of Attaining Love.”

Thus regarded, the universe is no longer merely the work of God, His manifestation and mirror, a volume which tells His greatness and sings His glory ; the universe is a veil behind which God is concealed. God is there, really present, in all the marvels of creation, offering Himself unceasingly to our adoration, our gratitude, and our love.

What am I saying ? God is not only present in all creatures, but, what is still more wonderful and touching, God acts in all His creatures. The influence of one creature outwardly upon another, the influences, so numerous and so varied, of others upon ourselves, upon our senses, our sight, our hearing, our sense of smell and of touch : all this is the action of God. God, present in all creatures, acts Himself upon us.*

* This presence of God in each of His creatures in no wise lessens the positive and substantial difference between the Infinite Being and the created being, nor the distinction of finite beings among themselves ; neither does the divine presence confuse the divine and infinite activity with the natural action of physical agents, nor with the exercise of man's free will.

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These thoughts have filled the saints with ecstasies of wonder and delight. "O God," cried St. Augustine, meditating upon these facts, "Thou art marvellous in the angels; but Thou art no less marvellous in the earth-worm!"

This is what we might call natural communion: communion with God through creation.

When we delight in an object or a living creature; when we contemplate the wondrous beauties of nature; when filled with enthusiasm before vast mountain-ranges and far-reaching plains, or beneath the profundity of a starlit night; when we listen, enchanted, to the murmur of the waves, the sighing of the wind, the song of birds; when we thus forget our weariness and sorrow, drawing renewed strength and courage from communion with Nature, we have in reality been in communion with God, and it is from Him that we have derived such strength and joy.

To see God present and at work in nature, in all creation, in every living thing; above all, to see Him present and at work in our fellow-creatures, in those free and reasoning beings made, as the Scriptures tell us, in His image and likeness; to see Him in our parents, our children, our friends; in all those who are united to us by ties of flesh and blood, of affection, or of social intercourse: this is a natural communion with God, a communion in itself holy and admirable, which would prove the source of incredible blessings to us if we only understood how best to effect it and to profit by it.

What grace we have here, close to us, but which, alas! is lost, although it would be so easy and so blessed to make it ours! Let us then strive without ceasing to communicate with God

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by means of what we may call the sacrament of nature, by this sacrament which consists of every creature that is and lives, since in every creature God lives and is.

There is another aspect of the question no less beautiful, no less effectual in increasing our piety.

If we can communicate with God by means of all created things, we also can serve, in a sense, as a sacrament by whose means all others can effect communion with God. How is this?

There is a universal law from which none can escape: the law of alimentation. Every creature that lives, from the lowest to the highest, has this need of nourishment.

The plant feeds upon the moisture of the earth; the animal feeds upon the plant, and serves in turn to nourish man.

We must eat or we must die; the law is explicit and irrevocable. No one can escape from the yoke; no one can shake it off; neither plant nor animal nor man. The earth itself is nourished by the fertilisers given it, deriving from them fresh and surprising fruitfulness.

What is the object of this law in the thought of God? Why this rigid and inexorable necessity of nourishment or death? God does nothing without reason; His wisdom reigns in all things. A law thus universal and unchangeable must reveal some great thought.

And here in truth is the wondrous design of God: God, who is the origin of all creatures, wishes also to be the end of all. Every existence issues from Him and lives by Him; it should also return to Him.

Every creature should therefore rise pro-

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gressively, mounting from its place on the mysterious scale of creation, and in so doing make its ascent towards God.

And this is in fact accomplished by assimilation or alimentation. Matter without life rises one degree by the medium of the plant which absorbs the minerals dissolved in the moisture of the soil. By means of this process of assimilation a marvellous transformation is effected: the dust of the earth becomes living plant-tissue.

Then comes the turn of the animal; it takes the plant, devours it, dissolves it, and transforms it into its own substance.

Finally, man takes the animal, cooks its flesh, digests it, and changes it into his own substance.

A natural communion is thus effected by means of digestion and assimilation. By some mysterious process the inferior element is made one, united, with the superior. All the most wonderful dreams of transformism and of evolution are realised, even surpassed, to a degree beyond the power of man to conceive.

The boldness of the design of God equals its splendour, and would overwhelm us were we not accustomed to it.

Man thus becomes the king, the pontiff, and the priest of creation. Placed at the summit of the scale of earthly creatures, resuming them all within himself by reason of his double nature, he should take them, offer them, consecrate them to God. It is through the ministry of man, it is in communion with man, that all living things return to God.

If we were conscious of our part as "kings and priests of creation"—it is St. Paul's expression—what an inexhaustible treasury of

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lofty thoughts, noble sentiments, and generous aspirations we should find therein !

We would no longer make use of the lower creatures merely to satisfy ourselves: we would use them only for God; to bring them back to God; to serve them as a ladder and a sacrament, in order to raise them up to God.

A hymn of praise, gratitude, and love would unceasingly rise from our hearts towards the Creator of the universe.

“ O soft rays of light,” we would say, “ pass by my eyes, so to return to the eternal light from which you sprang !

“ O sweet harmonies, pass by my ears, that you may reach Him whose word has created all the worlds; for you are but a faint echo of His voice !

“ O pure and refreshing waters, pass by my lips, that you may return to the living and never-failing source of all grace and all goodness !

“ O bread, O mysterious sustenance, pass by my mouth, that you may reach Him who is the bread of life, eternal and incorruptible !

“ O truth, pass by my spirit; O beauties of art and nature, beauties of all created marvels, pass by my imagination, in order to return to the source of all truth and all beauty, to Him who is truth unmixed with error, and beauty without blemish or shadow !

“ O friends, kinsmen, dearest of beings, enter, oh, enter my heart ! O sinners, unbelievers and unfaithful, whom I so long to lead back to God ! All of you, enter my soul, that I may give you, consecrate you, and unite you for ever to the infinite and unchangeable Love, to

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Him who is all Love, to Him whose name is Love, for ' God is Love ' !

" O all created things, whatever you be, whether living or inanimate, come to me that I may lead you to God ! Let me take you that I may raise you to communion with God ! "

No ! we do not dream in speaking thus. No ! we are not allowing ourselves to be carried away by our imagination into a region of illusion.

We have the word of the apostle to reassure us ; we are " the kings and the priests " of creation. There is not a created thing that we cannot take, raise, transform, and unite with God ; not a creature which we cannot serve as sacrament, bringing it into communion with God !

To sum up : there is, then, a double natural communion. You can communicate with God by means of every created being, and you can serve as sacrament and priest to every created being, thus bringing it into communion with God.

Do not pass lightly over these reflections ; meditate upon them, return to them often, familiarise yourself with them by the habit of thinking about them.

You do not know all that you will find therein of light, strength, and consolation, what impulses towards goodness and moral energy, what assistance in prayer and in love of God !

Lastly, it will be an excellent and necessary preparation for the comprehension and enjoyment of supernatural communion, which we shall next consider.

CHAPTER II

SUPERNATURAL COMMUNION

“What shall I render to the Lord, for all the things that He hath rendered to me?”—*Ps. cxvi. 12.*

COMMUNION is the uniting of oneself with someone or something. No being can exist save by reason of a certain unity, which is, as it were, a participation in the divine unity. The more closely a being is united to God, the higher the level of its existence.

There is a double natural communion with God: firstly, the whole of nature is for us a kind of sacrament which in a certain manner contains God living and acting, and by whose means we can communicate with God. Secondly, we ourselves are the priests of creation, and can bring all things into communion with God.

Such is the summing-up of what we have already said.

If God had done nothing else for us, we ought still to bless Him all the days of our lives, so rich in mercy and goodness is this first of His favours. But this is only the commencement of His gifts and the dawn of His love. Here we come to the full light of day, the overflowing abundance.

Far above the natural communion of all His creatures with Himself, God wished to institute a communion of a new and absolutely superior

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order, which for this reason we designate as supernatural communion.

This communion so completely surpasses the former in intimacy, depth, and perfection that we could never have hoped for it, nor even conceived it, without revelation. We are only able to speak of it in the light of the teachings of the Gospels and the Church.

Supernatural communion surpasses all the exigencies and even all the capacities of nature. If a mineral became all at once a vegetable; if a plant suddenly climbed into the animal kingdom, receiving eyes, limbs, and the gifts of life and movement in the stricter sense, this marvel would attract the attention of all the scientists alive. The marvel of supernatural communion is far greater; for by its means human nature is, as it were, deified.

Between the mineral and the plant, between the plant and the animal, the distance, however great, is measurable and finite. But between human nature and the divine nature the distance is positively infinite. Now, by means of supernatural communion human nature becomes "a partaker in the divine nature." Scripture expressly tells us as much. This is the marvel unique amongst all.

We receive not only exterior gifts and new faculties, but a new life and a new nature. And such a nature, such a life! The life and the nature of God! "We are partakers of the divine nature."*

* The divine nature in itself is essentially incommunicable. The participation in question is effected by a special means which unites us intimately with God, and which, properly speaking, is grace.

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In what degree and in what manner has this communication of the divine nature to humanity been effected? In three degrees and in three manners: by hypostatic union, by the union of grace, and by sacramental union.

Hypostatic union is that which is peculiar to the Incarnate Word. It is unique, and belongs to Him alone; no created being, not even the Blessed Virgin, has ever attained to it. Our Lord Jesus Christ alone has possessed it.

In what does this union consist?

A human nature, the same as our own, consisting of a body and soul, capable of sensation, liable to suffering, endowed like ours with intelligence, will, memory, and heart—in short, with all the qualities that constitute our humanity—this nature was seized upon, if we may put it so, by the second Person of the Holy Trinity, by the Son of God, who took possession of it and united it to Himself in such a degree that it became henceforth one with Him.

A body and a soul, bound together as by the ordinary laws, constitute a person, a subjective being responsible for its actions, a being that says “I.” It is no longer thus in the Word Incarnate. There is the mystery and the prodigy of divine love. The Son of God has so laid hold of human nature, has so far placed it in total dependence that, while leaving it its liberty and its merit, He has deprived it of its personality. The actions of this human nature thus united with God, the actions of this body and this soul, no longer belong to the human person, for this no longer exists, but to the divine person, which alone exists in Jesus Christ.

What the body and soul of Jesus do is done

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by the Son of God. It is He who imparts His own dignity to the actions of this human nature, thereby giving them an infinite value.

This is what revelation teaches us: a mystery which is beyond us, which we cannot understand. But what we can very well grasp, and what fills us with admiration, is the fact that the human and the divine nature are so far united that they exist at one and the same time in one and the same person, that of the Son of God; so that we may say of the man that he is truly God, and of God that He is truly man, since one divine person has actually and absolutely two natures: one human, one divine.

This union is not only the most absolute union of which it is possible to conceive, but the most absolute which even God Himself could realise: it is called hypostatic union.

Hypostatic union, which belongs only to Christ, is for us the source of all graces and all blessings.

By the will of God Christ is the perfect man, the man whom we are all called upon to resemble; He by whom we must all be redeemed and sanctified.

The supernatural life flows from the human nature of Christ into our own, as by a mysterious channel. It passes into us, flows through us like the sap of the vine which flows from the trunk into the branches—the comparison is made by our Lord Himself in the Gospel—or like the blood which circulates through all the members of a single body.

Nevertheless, this supernatural life, which Christ merits for us and transmits to us, does not

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reach us in the same fulness that it knows in Him. It is checked, if we may say so, on the frontiers of personality: respecting it and allowing it to exist within itself, not suppressing it as in Jesus Christ.

This is doubtless sufficient to place a gulf between hypostatic union and union by grace. But with this exception the supernatural life is poured forth into human nature in as full a measure as the latter consents to receive, and as it pleases God, according to His designs, to bestow upon His creatures.

Mary surpasses all created beings. By her willing co-operation, her full assent, and the absolute adherence and faithful assistance freely given by her to the designs of God, Mary has received the utmost effusion of divine grace that human nature is capable of supporting. Moreover, the Fathers of the Church tell us that Mary touches the confines of divinity; and the angel salutes her as "full of grace," an expression which must be taken literally, and which signifies that in Mary human nature is positively filled and overflowing with the grace of God.

Mary has thus supernaturally communicated with God as far as a created being can without ceasing to be itself. Between her and the divinity the union was the most intimate, the most profound, and the most perfect which human nature is capable of receiving.

This is why Mary occupies, after her Son, a place absolutely apart, above all the angels and above all the saints. And even as she gave Jesus to us, it is still and always through her that the divine life from the humanity of the Word comes down to us. Divine grace flows

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into Jesus, from Jesus into Mary, and from Mary into us.

You see to what height the communion by grace raises us. It is indeed a new life that is given to us: "I am come that they may have life," said our Lord, "and in fuller measure." Already we have natural life; Jesus would not have spoken thus if it had not been a question of another life actually different and superior to the life of nature. He explained this expressly to Nicodemus: "Unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." And as the Jew was amazed and did not understand, Jesus insisted: "Amen, I say unto thee, unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Jesus was speaking of baptism, which, by means of water, the outward sign, and by the Holy Spirit descending invisibly but really into the soul, bestows upon us new life, supernatural life, the life of grace, and makes us children of God, of the same nature as He, because this second birth "proceeds not from the flesh nor from the will of man, but from God."

Thus by means of baptism we make our first supernatural communion, the communion of grace, which instils in us the supernatural life in essence and in substance, leaves in our flesh the principle of future immortality, and in our soul that of the vision face to face and of the possession of God in heaven.

This supernatural life we may lose by sin, but we do not lose the power which we have acquired to recover it, which baptism confers upon us in marking us with an indelible sign.

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In His ineffable mercy God has ordained admirable means not only for restoring supernatural life to us, should we have the misfortune to lose it, but also for increasing it always and unceasingly within our souls.

All the sacraments are instituted to this end: they are the marvellous channels by which the divine nature communicates itself to human nature.

One of the sacraments, however, is beyond all comparison superior to the others: this is sacramental communion. It gives us, surrenders to us, and places at our unqualified disposition the very Author of grace, the origin and source of all grace, the humanity and the divinity of the Word: Jesus, God and Man.

Do not seek to understand the mystery; but let us, with greatest joy, receive the revealed teaching. In every consecrated host Jesus is wholly present, without diminution, without division of Himself; all His divinity, all His humanity, His whole person, and all the graces in which He abounds: all is contained in this little host, which is placed upon your lips and which descends into your heart.

Jesus is there, for you, as wholly for you as if there were none but you, as if you were alone in the world. This host is yours, yours only, and completely yours. And this host is Jesus, and it is the whole of Jesus. He is present in this host for your sake. By it He comes to you, He sacrifices Himself in you and for you.

How can we fail to be filled with enthusiasm in the presence of such marvels?—before such “excesses” (since the word is used in the Scriptures) and such prodigality of love?

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We shall presently consider the union which is effected between the soul and Jesus. We shall speak of the ineffable grace that proceeds therefrom, and of all the effects of communion; but for the moment what can be said of this alone, of the actual and supernatural presence of Jesus in a human soul?

Could one possibly fail, being possessed of a spark of faith and a heart which is not of stone, to be penetrated to one's innermost being by the profoundest sentiments of adoration and gratitude and love?

Could one fail to open one's soul to the utmost to Him who longs to fill it?

Could one fail to detest all that is evil? Not only all that divides us from God, but all that could offend or displease Him?

Is it possible not to despise all the vanities of this world as dust, to fear them as a danger?

Is it possible not to aspire to goodness, virtue, humility, purity, patience, and prayer?

Can we fail to cling with all our strength to grace, to the supernatural life, and to all the blessings that proceed therefrom?

Can we fail to consecrate to Jesus a love without reserve, without limits, and without end?

Can we fail, in short, to cry to Him, with the apostle, with all the force of our life and all the energies of our being: "Who shall ever part me from Thee?"

And on reflecting that it is not once only, not one day, in passing, that Jesus thus comes, but often, always, each day if we will, and until the hour of our last breath: then it is no longer enough to feel joy and love and gratitude; but we should be seized with a holy longing to sing

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for ever the infinite goodness and mercies of the Lord; not only with our lips and our tongue, which have touched His sacred body, but with our whole spirit, with all our heart and all our will, with all our might, in all our thoughts, words, actions, works, and with all our life, by all the powers and faculties of our moral and physical being.

Yes, if we knew the gift of God we would long for Holy Communion as the supreme grace; we should aspire to it as to the sovereign good!

A day on which we had not received communion would seem to us like those gloomy days of winter when the sun has not shone.

And the thought of souls that live without communion would move us to compassion far greater than that which we should feel at the sight of unhappy creatures perishing of poverty and hunger!

And if the impossible were to happen, and we were told that never in this world should we again receive communion, we would feel like dying of sorrow and regret!

CHAPTER III

THE EFFECTS OF SACRAMENTAL COMMUNION WITH REGARD TO GOD AND OUR NEIGHBOUR

“He loved them unto the end.”—*St. John* xiii. 1.

THE apostle St. John opens the narrative of the institution of the Eucharist with these words: “Christ . . . having loved His own which were in this world, loved them unto the end.” This does not mean simply to the end of His life, but to the utmost limit of love. Sacramental communion is the supreme effort of divine love; it exhausts the treasury, infinite though it be, of the liberality and the goodness of God; for God, despite His omnipotence and His love, cannot go further, nor bestow on us a gift surpassing that of sacramental communion. In this gift Jesus went to the very limit of His own love, He has loved us “unto the end.”

For what, after all, is communion? What gift do we receive therein? Let us briefly consider the teachings of faith on this subject.

How greatly are Protestants to be pitied! In communion they see nothing but an image, a figure, a symbol. They have distorted the thought of the Master; they have destroyed His work; they have denied His love!

We Catholics believe that communion is a reality. The consecrated host that we receive

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is Jesus Himself, in the integrity of His person and of His double nature; Jesus as He was born of Mary; as He lay in the manger; as He was in the arms and on the breast of His Mother; as He was in Nazareth, in the desert, during His public life, working His great miracles, multiplying the loaves, walking upon the waters, bringing the dead to life; Jesus as He was at Gethsemane and during His Passion—scourged, crowned with thorns, fastened to the cross, giving that cry of distress and dying in the fulness of confidence and love; Jesus as He is on high, at the right hand of His Father, causing the eternal joy and happiness of the angels, the elect, and the saints; Jesus as He will come to the Last Judgment on the clouds of heaven; such, lastly, as we ourselves shall see Him in paradise, in bliss, without flaw and without end.

Jesus, man and God: man, in His soul and His body, His intelligence and will, His mind and heart; Jesus, with the fulness of the divine nature, eternal, unchangeable, infinitely wise, infinitely powerful, infinitely merciful, infinitely good; Jesus, Son of God, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, engendered by His Father and consubstantial with Him, from whom the Holy Ghost proceeds as from the Father; Jesus, inseparably united to the Father and the Spirit, making one only with them, one single divinity, one single God !

This is the gift that is bestowed upon us in communion; a gift ineffable, incomparable, all-surpassing, all-containing, all-bestowing !

Is it astonishing that sacramental communion produces three kinds of effects, all most marvellous, each more immeasurable than the other :

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effects with regard to God, with regard to our neighbour, and with regard to ourselves?

In this chapter we will speak only of those effects which relate to God and our neighbour. You do not sufficiently consider these when you communicate. You think only of yourself. Too often you forget God and the others.

Now each communion, to begin with, gives to God infinite glory; for all that Jesus came into this world to do He renews in you by means of communion.

Jesus came into this world before all to glorify His Father.

The pagan world was plunged in darkness, idolatry, and death. "All was God," cries Bossuet, "except God Himself!"

Jesus descended from heaven to re-establish the rights and the worship of His Father, and to reduce all false gods to dust.

He came to adore the true God, and by His adoration to give Him infinite glory. He said this to His apostles before leaving them: "Now is God glorified in His Son. Now, O Father, I have made Thy name manifest before men."

How has Jesus glorified His Father in this world? By offering Him sovereign homage, the perfect homage of His intelligence, His will, His heart, His senses, His body, His soul, and His life.

As man Jesus annihilated Himself before God. He said to Him: "I am nothing, and Thou art all; I am that which is not, and Thou art That which Is."

And by an admirable mystery of love the homage of the humility of the Word proceeding

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from a divine Person attained to the height of God, equalled God, gave to God an unparalleled glory—a glory positively infinite.

Now, when you have communicated, this act of adoration, which is really infinite, really divine, is renewed in you by Jesus. Jesus, by you, says to His Father: “My Father, here I am; I recognise and I praise Your sovereignty, Your wisdom, Your power, Your love, and Your eternal and infinite being, from which proceeds all, by which all exists, without which nothing could be. I prostrate myself before you more completely than ever. At Bethlehem, at Nazareth, in Galilee, on Calvary, men still saw My humanity; I was something. Now, here, I am no longer anything; neither sight nor taste nor touch can discover Me. In appearance I am a mere nothingness. To You alone the honour, the being, and the glory.” This is what Jesus has said and done within you by means of communion.

Again, Jesus came into this world to thank His Father.

How could the world have thanked God, since it no longer even knew Him? The world existed by the benefits of God; and all unconscious of this, it despised them, it turned His goodness against Him.

Jesus came to give His Father the thanks which He awaited in vain from His ungrateful and rebellious creatures. Recalling in memory and in spirit all the benefits of God, all the innumerable favours with which God had never since the beginning of the world ceased to overwhelm His creatures, filling His heart with

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infinite gratitude, and feeling the unspeakable desire to say to God: "I thank Thee," Jesus instituted the Eucharist. He took Himself between His own hands; He sacrificed Himself beforehand, and decided to perpetuate that sacrifice until the end of time, so that He might unceasingly say to His Father: "My Father, I thank Thee."

Jesus still renders these thanks; He has continued the act of gratitude; He renews it in you when you communicate. Do you understand now what joy your communion gives to God?

Jesus also came into this world to repair, efface, destroy sin. Sin is His enemy, His irreconcilable adversary.

Now Jesus has continued this work of the destruction of sin by means of communion. I am not at this moment speaking of your own sins merely; to those I will return. I am speaking of the sins of the world. Your heart becomes the altar and the cross of Jesus. Jesus, in your heart, by means of communion, offers Himself as a victim to His Father, to satisfy His justice, to efface the dishonour which sin causes Him, to atone for the way in which it has outraged Him, to re-establish all His violated rights, and to render His infinite Majesty the homage which the sinner refuses.

Jesus, in you, says to His Father: "I obey You for them; I surrender and submit Myself for them; I love and accept Your laws for those that reject them; I bear Your yoke for those that refuse and evade it. I stand security for Your debtors; for them I pay the debt they unjustly refuse to acknowledge. I give Myself

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as a sacrifice, in satisfaction and reparation for the sins of the world." This is what takes place within you when you communicate. Oh, wonders of divine love !

Finally, Jesus came into the world to pray.

The lips of men had long been silent, for their hearts were withered.

Jesus opened His lips and His heart in a sublime, ardent, and continual prayer. From the first moment of His life to the last, from the breast of Mary to Calvary, Jesus never ceased to address His earnest supplications to heaven. What we have gained by His divine intercessions in the form of light, strength, consolation, pardon, succour, grace, of life and of love, it is impossible to say. Jesus only and His Father know all that we owe to "this prayer of God," as the Gospel says.

Now, "this prayer of God," in communion, has been renewed and continued in you by Jesus. In you He prostrates Himself and supplicates, as at Gethsemane and on the Mount of Olives, during the long nights which He consecrated to prayer. In you He raises towards God His bleeding arms, as on Calvary. In you He shows His Father His wounds, His scars, His blood, His sorrows, His anguish, His thirst, His distress. In you He says, with that all-powerful cry of which St. Paul tells us, which reached up to heaven: "My Father, enlighten them, pardon them, help them, sustain them, bless them, have pity upon their misery and their distress, overwhelm them with Your grace and Your mercy !" That is what Jesus comes to say in your hearts when you communicate.

What, then, are we to think of the effects of

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communion with regard to God, and how can we express them? Remember that a single act of the Incarnate Word, a single thought, a single prayer, a single word from Him has an omnipotent and infinite value.

What therefore can we find to say of this adoration, this act of thanksgiving, this reparation, and these prayers which Jesus comes to offer within us at the hour of communion? What honour, what glory, what joy, what satisfaction, what homage for His Father, for God, for the most Holy Trinity?

And all this glory, all this homage, God receives in you, through you, because of you: it is your communion which gives them to Him; it is through this communion that they reach Him. Had you not made this communion they would not have been His. Every time you communicate you bring them to Him; and when you fail to communicate you deprive Him of them.

Will you not henceforth be more than ever careful that you do not by your own fault miss a single communion?

And not only is it in you and through you that God receives so much homage and glory; but, in a sense, it is you who give them, it is you who become the efficient and productive cause of this homage; for when you communicate Jesus is united with you, He is one with you. This adoration, these thanks, this atonement, these prayers, are given to God by you: it is to you that God owes them!

What merit for you! What a source of glory and reward! What a title to love, to the gratitude and the favours of God! Can God

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fail to bless, to overwhelm with blessings, in this world and the other, a creature who does so much for Him, who brings such homage to Him ?

Oh, my God, how good You are to have performed such prodigies for us ! And how wretched are we that we understand them so badly and profit by them so little !

Finally, all this power of Christ, who is within you, and whom in a certain sense you yourself are, can be used to the profit of others in Holy Communion.

Jesus lives in you, and that which you do He does; that which you wish He wishes; that which you say He says.

When you have communicated, therefore, say to God with unshakable confidence, in presenting to Him Jesus, whom you possess: " My God, I offer You the feelings, the desires, the prayers of Your Son, for my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, my husband and children; for all sinners; for the incredulous, all persecutors, the sick and afflicted, the poor and unhappy; for the heathen, the infidel, for heretics; for those who belong to me, for my country, and for the world."

You may even go beyond the bounds of the visible universe and say: " My God, I offer You Your Son, for this soul among the elect in heaven; for that soul in purgatory; for the honour and glory of the one, for the solace and deliverance of the other, that it may enter into heaven."

Oh, when you have received Holy Communion you must be conscious of your greatness, of your dignity, of all that you are, of your worth !

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Realise your power and make use of your rights. Let your heart be as great as God's. Be bold in asking all—all that is just and good, holy and pleasing to God.

Since Jesus is one with you, take heed that you are one with Him. Enter into His thoughts, His desires, His intentions, His will; be truly no other than Himself, in order to continue His adoration, His thanksgiving, His atonement, His petitions, His work of redemption, benediction, and life; for the conversion of sinners; for the welfare and salvation of the souls of your fellows; for the triumph of truth and virtue here below, and the victory of Holy Church against her enemies; for the glory, lastly, of the most Holy Trinity, the glory of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST EFFECTS OF COMMUNION WITH REGARD TO OURSELVES : HABITUAL GRACES

"Come, gather yourselves together to the great supper of God."—*Apocal.* xix. 17.

"He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath everlasting life."—*St. John* vi. 55.

WHEN you communicate, as we have said, you personally receive Jesus, true God and true man; His body and blood, His soul and divinity. He comes into you as He came into the world, for the glory of His Father. He continues in you, and by you extends His divine mission. He adores His Father. He thanks Him. He offers Himself to His Father as a victim, for atonement and reparation. He prays to Him for infidels and for the baptised, for sinners, for the just, and for the souls in purgatory; He prays to Him for all the members of the Church militant and the Church suffering.

All this Jesus does through you; it is you, united to Jesus, that do this with Him and in Him. Your credit is at its utmost, and you can use it in the service of your brothers; to avail for their sins, in order to wipe them out; and for their souls, to succour and save them.

Such are the effects of communion with regard to God and your neighbour. You do not think

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of this sufficiently; you too often neglect this power; this is why I speak of it first of all.

Let us now proceed to the effects which are produced in you yourselves by communion. They are no less marvellous. One word sums them up: communion is LIFE !

Seated beneath the beautiful oaks of Cap Montenero one morning, awaiting the rising of the sun, Lamartine beheld the orb of day all at once appearing above the horizon and casting its fires upon the sea. Thrilled at the sight, he arose, full of enthusiasm, and cried: " It is he, it is life !"

When you communicate the divine sun rises upon your souls; it envelops them, fires them, penetrates them with its brightest and warmest rays; it is Jesus, it is LIFE that flows into you !

And what life ! The very life of Jesus, divine life; to call it by its true name, Grace—sanctifying grace and actual grace. Let us consider in detail and specify the effects of grace bestowed by communion. In this chapter we will confine ourselves to sanctifying grace.

To begin with, sanctifying grace continues and completes in your souls the work of the destruction of sin.

For you who are about to communicate have indeed sinned; you are wounded, infirm, sick; I will not say dead.

When you come to the holy table you must be living. If you were knowingly of the dead you would profane the sacrament; your coming would insult the body and blood of Jesus; you would commit a sacrilege.

The soul which is dead through sin must be

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brought to life again before communicating, and must pass through the tribunal of penitence. If after having committed a mortal sin you make a perfect act of contrition, that is to say contrition by love, with the desire for absolution, you will immediately return to life. But even so, you cannot yet communicate. For the sake of prudence, in the fear that your contrition may be imperfect and your sins not yet forgiven, the Church exacts, in the presence of so great a sacrament, that you shall first receive absolution. No one, after a mortal sin, even if certain of having made a perfect act of contrition and hence of having recovered spiritual life—no one should communicate without having been absolved by a priest, except in case of absolute necessity.

However, if you happen to be guilty of mortal sin and in a state of imperfect contrition, and thus continuing in a condition of spiritual death, you approach the holy table in good faith, that is to say, in ignorance of your real state, Jesus is so good that He will pardon and efface your sin, restore you to life, and bring you back to grace.

Aside from this exceptional case you should, when you go to communion, be of the living. But what are you, even so? Alas! you are covered with wounds and full of infirmities.

Let us speak figuratively, to make these thoughts more striking.

Some have feeble and imperfect sight; they perceive the truths of faith dimly; they grasp them but vaguely. The beauty of the divine Saviour is veiled to their eyes; a thick mist is before them, which prevents them from seeing clearly.

Others are hard of hearing; they receive divine

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instruction with difficulty; they gain only a faint, confused impression; part of the heavenly doctrine escapes them.

With others it is their speech that is slow and embarrassed; they stammer rather than speak; they can barely utter some few words of God and religion. Nothing useful and beneficial to others comes from their unskilled lips.

Others are wholly paralysed; the least action performed for God, the least thing done for others, the least act of piety or charity, is an effort and wearies them. They are slow and heavy in moving on the supernatural plane.

Others are profoundly anæmic, withered to the bone; their veins are bloodless. They still breathe, but how slowly, and how feebly! They live, but barely; their hearts still beat, but so faintly!

Now the hour of communion has come; Jesus is about to enter these souls. What will He do?

Formerly, during His mortal life, men brought Him sufferers of all kinds: the blind, the deaf, the dumb, the paralysed, the dying; and the Gospel relates the compassion of Jesus in the presence of this host of the afflicted. His profound emotion, the tears He shed, the tremors that went through Him.

If the sight of material misery touched Him to this degree and drew from Him His greatest and most wonderful miracles, is it possible that the miseries of your souls, your spiritual wounds and infirmities, will not touch Him a hundred times more deeply?

When Jesus descends into your souls, what is it that takes place? Hardly is He there but He is troubled, touched, full of tenderness. He is

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seized with compassion and pity; and, like a mother beside her sick child, He uses all His power, all His love, to heal you. And never did any mother in this world, not even the gentlest and most devoted, bring to the child of her heart a solicitude approaching in love and goodness that which Jesus contrives to lavish upon souls in Holy Communion.

Let us continue to speak figuratively.

Jesus unseals your eyes with marvellous power. He opens your ears and your lips. He restores warmth and suppleness to your limbs. He renews and enriches your blood. He renders your circulation and your respiration more active. He causes your heart to beat with more force and greater regularity. He delivers you, one by one, from all your afflictions. He heals all your sores; He closes all your wounds. He restores to all your faculties—reason, will, memory, imagination—their rectitude, their strength, their beauty, the fulness of their life. He reanimates your soul and gives it back its full activity.

This is what Jesus comes to accomplish in us. He comes to undo the work of evil, to raise again the ruins that sin has accumulated, to repair all weakened and diminished faculties, to give back to each its normal function; in short, to renew and restore your soul, to raise it up, to heal it and bestow upon it its original plenitude of health.

Let us add that as sin has made you the debtors of God, so that by reason of His incorruptible justice an atonement is required, Jesus substitutes Himself for you, becomes your security, pays and cancels for you the sum of your offences,

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and delivers you from the penalties which you would otherwise have had to pay as a result of your faults.

Each communion destroys at least a portion of your indebtedness to God, and diminishes, in a measure which depends upon your fervour and your dispositions, the time which you will pass in purgatory. The efficacy of a single communion as a means of atonement is such that it would suffice to pay all your debts to the uttermost farthing, and the debts of many other sinners, if your dispositions were sufficiently holy.

Thus the first effect of communion is the grace of healing and convalescence, causing the destruction of all morbid germs and the return of the soul to full health.

"If my heart is withered within me," cried the prophet, "it is that I have forgotten to eat my bread!" Whence comes the moral anæmia, the spiritual degeneration, the insurmountable apathy, the inconceivable inertia of so very many souls? It is because they have "forgotten to eat their bread," to resort to the divine remedy of the Eucharist, to drink of the fountain of life, the miraculous spring, to plunge in the wondrous pool in which all maladies, all weaknesses, and all exhaustion find their unerring cure.

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And while all your spiritual infirmities are healed, communion also brings you a marvellous increase of sanctifying grace, that is, of the supernatural life.

Grace resembles a communication of the very life of God; one may almost say that it deifies us.

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But this life of God, hidden here below in the mysterious depths of the soul, which will one day burst into full flower and permit us to see God face to face and to know Him as He knows us—this life of God within us exists in an infinite variety of degrees; and it may grow beyond all reckoning up to the very hour of death.

On the degree which it has then attained will depend for all eternity our place and our rank in heaven, and the glory and happiness which we shall then enjoy.

All the elect shall see God: but more or less clearly. All will see Him wholly, but not all in the same measure.

When a number of persons all regard the same object each of them sees it complete, but each sees differently. Those who enjoy good sight see better than those whose sight is imperfect. Those who use a magnifying glass can distinguish more than those that employ the naked eye.

Thus in heaven we shall see and possess the whole of the Divinity; but the penetration of our sight and the intensity of our joy will depend upon the degree of divine life to which our souls have attained.

Now this degree of divine life will consist in the quantity of sanctifying grace that we may have acquired up to the hour of death. What a precious encouragement to communion is this thought: that communion is life, which increases in us to overflowing!

Life on our earth diminishes or increases as the earth communicates, more or less fully, with the sun.

In winter there is death: and why? The sun is low on the horizon; its oblique rays glance

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over the soil rather than penetrate it. There is no communion between the sun and the earth; hence no heat, no life.

Presently the sun mounts higher; its rays, falling more perpendicularly, commence to penetrate the earth and to warm it. Communion commences—the communion of spring—and at once life reappears; the trees are covered with buds. And as the rays of the sun become more direct, and their penetration deeper, the heat more intense, and communion more perfect, so life increases. Then comes the communion of summer; the flowers bloom, the harvest ripens, and fruits mature. Life is everywhere to overflowing.

But hardly does this communion between the earth and the sun lessen in intensity than the heat also decreases; life grows less, and gradually wastes away. Life departs with communion and heat. It is soon autumn, then winter; death returns and overwhelms life.

Such is the likeness of your communions.

There are autumn communions; your first fervour slackens, you become lukewarm; you no longer receive that abundance of grace by whose means life blossoms within you; and these are grave symptoms of approaching coolness.

There are also, alas! winter communions; communions which glance off the soul without penetrating it, without enabling it to profit by the grace given.

But, O happiness, O heavenly joy!—there are springtime communions which cause the soul to thrill with happiness, which ravish it with delight. O paradise on earth! there are summer communions, when divinity covers our souls

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with warmest embraces and penetrates them with most powerful rays.

Ah! who would not make such springtide communions; still more, such communions of summer? Remember that each increase of sanctifying grace which you receive in communicating, even the smallest, has its influence on your eternal life. In consequence of this increase you will know God better and love Him for ever with a greater love.

You will see more deeply into the heart of divinity, and divinity will flow more abundantly into the recesses of your being. The light by which you will know God will shine more brightly; the flame of your love for Him will burn more ardently within your heart. You will be nearer to Mary; you will possess Jesus more intimately; you will love Him more perfectly.

Yes, when you communicate Jesus comes to you to give you life in a yet more generous abundance; He opens His holy humanity, His sacred heart, as an immense reservoir; and from it He draws the waves of sanctifying grace to shower upon your souls, to beautify and enrich them for all eternity.

Moreover—and here be attentive—these graces do not pass away; they do not traverse your soul to glide away and become lost after producing a momentary effect. These graces remain and will remain for ever. Neither your imperfections nor your sins can henceforth deprive you of them.

It is true that if you fall into mortal sin the enjoyment of these acquired merits will be temporarily withdrawn, and if you die in this state will never be restored to you.

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But if after a mortal sin you return to the state of grace, the goodness of God is such that you will immediately recover all your merits without the least diminution, and therefore your right, in the other world, to the same degree of glory and happiness as before.

Such is the worth of sanctifying grace; it is the treasure of which the Gospel speaks, the treasure against which nothing can prevail; neither moth nor rust can corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal it. No sin, no infidelity can diminish its value. Only death in God's disfavour can deprive you for ever of its fruits.

Certainly every good work, every prayer, every virtuous deed, however small in itself, will also increase this treasure of supernatural life within your souls. But no action and no sacrament can increase it as communion can, for communion contains grace in its very source, and instead of giving you grace in a certain measure it gives it without measure; for in communion the limits of the grace received do not depend upon the parsimony of God, but on the narrowness of your hearts, just as the quantity of water brought from a spring does not depend upon the spring, which is inexhaustible, but upon the vessel which you employ to hold the water.

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Thus communion restores your health; it heals all your infirmities; it increases beyond all measure the supernatural life within you, and therefore the extent and the greatness of your eternal happiness.

Do you understand the urgency of the appeal which St. Augustine addressed to the faithful

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of Carthage, when he called them to the foot of the altar? "Come and eat life, drink life, and you will have life!"

This appeal Jesus makes to all souls of goodwill: "Come," He says to them, "eat of My bread, drink of the wine I have prepared for you. This bread is My flesh, and he that eats of My flesh and drinks of My blood shall receive eternal life."

In the Apocalypse the apostle St. John describes one of his visions thus: He saw the sun shining with an unaccustomed light in the midst of the firmament; and God permitted him to gaze upon it without being dazzled. And then in the midst of the sun St. John perceived an angel in human form. This angel was standing upright. Around the sun, across space, flew a host of birds. And the angel, in a mighty voice, called to all the birds; he cried to them: "Come, gather yourselves together to the great supper of God!"

Is not our worldly sun the Church, the infallible guardian of truth, the home of light, the authorised interpreter of divine thought? And the angel in the sun, is He not Jesus in the midst of His Church—Jesus, who has promised that He will abide with her until the end of time?

And the great feast to which Jesus calls us, is it not the banquet of truth, the festival of love, the feast of life? The feast of His doctrine, but also the feast of His flesh and blood, of His humanity and divinity; the feast of Holy Communion?

The birds that fly across space are all those souls that are reluctant to be confined upon the

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earth, to drag themselves through the mire; they are those souls whom faith and love, like all-powerful wings, raise above the world and carry up to God—birds of lofty flight that love the summits; birds of tempest that strive with the winds and know how to profit by them, and birds of weaker and heavier flight that cannot rise above a certain height; birds, the images of souls, some pure and glowing with love; others tempted, but generous and victorious; others wounded, yet not dead, which force themselves to rise undiscouraged by their lack of strength.

These are the souls of good-will that Jesus calls, the souls to whom He cries: "Come and gather together for the great supper of God," communion, the sacred festival of the earth, which is but a prelude and a foretaste of that of heaven. Come and eat the sacred flesh which will sustain your efforts and carry you higher day by day, until the moment when, with one last stroke of the wings, one supreme effort, you at last arrive before the ineffable love-feast of life glorious and immortal !

CHAPTER V

OTHER EFFECTS OF COMMUNION: ACTUAL GRACES

“If thou didst know the gift of God.”—*St. John* iv. 10.

WE have already considered two effects of communion in relation to ourselves. It heals, in a sense, the wounds which sin has made in the soul; it heals and restores health to the soul. At the same time it brings us an increase of sanctifying grace, in a measure that depends upon our dispositions.

Another effect of communion consists in a considerable gain of actual graces.

Actual grace differs from sanctifying or habitual grace. Sanctifying grace is a participation in the nature of God. It affects the very depths of our being and the substance of our soul, upon which, moreover, it confers new faculties.

I will explain. In the ordinary way you can only see light, persons and things, plants—and all beings, in short—by means of your eyes. You can hear sounds, music and words, only by means of your ears. In a word, you can only communicate with the material world by means of your senses, for your senses are of the same nature as the world. And if you had neither eyes nor ears you would neither hear nor see.

Now, for the same reason, you cannot of your own nature either see or hear God, nor can you

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communicate with Him, because your nature is different from His. His is divine, yours human.

To enable you to see and hear God and communicate with Him as you will in heaven, you must become of the same nature as God. And it is this that is effected by sanctifying grace. It endows you with a second nature and new faculties. Thenceforth you have become capable of seeing God, of hearing Him, and of possessing Him. You have become capable of believing, hoping, and loving supernaturally, which you could not do without these superior faculties born of the divine nature in which you have become participators.

Habitual or sanctifying grace, therefore, communicates to you in a greater or less degree the divine nature, and endows you with a complete body of faculties which are attached to that nature.

But God, who knew you so well, knew that in order to ensure your salvation you must have something more than a new nature and new powers.

Consider your children. They bring with them at birth a complete and integral human nature; they have intelligence, will, memory, heart, and imagination.

Is this enough for them? No. Leave a child to itself and it will never develop; all its moral and intellectual faculties will remain in a rudimentary condition.

What, then, does it need? An awakening of its faculties; a permanent stimulation which sets them in operation; an assistance which helps, directs, and develops them. And all this is given by education.

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Now actual grace is the stimulant, the support, the director of the supernatural faculties which are within us by reason of sanctifying grace. Actual grace is the divine teacher entrusted with the formation of our souls, which aids them and leads them in the paths of goodness.

The intelligence remains inactive in the depths of the soul, slumbering until the soul is awakened and forced to reflect; likewise, sanctifying grace and the virtues which accompany it require the stimulant of actual grace before they can achieve practical results.

Moreover, by reason of original sin and concupiscence you were generally and habitually disposed to evil. Sanctifying grace has rendered you generally and habitually disposed to good.

But you remain subject to temptation, to transitory and individual attacks of the spirit of evil. Actual grace will bring you transitory and individual succour to assure you of the victory.

A permanent succour against a permanent hostility: such is sanctifying and habitual grace. A passing succour against passing assaults: such is actual grace.

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Now, what are the actual graces that you receive in Holy Communion? Let us try to specify their nature and effects. We may distinguish two sorts: those which deliver us from evil, and those which lead us towards good.

Actual grace delivers us from evil in two ways: either it weakens temptation, or it gives us an increase of strength to overcome it.

If temptation comes from the devil, is it surprising that communion should weaken it?

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Of old, when demons in the bodies of those possessed saw Jesus coming toward them, they cried, so the Gospel tells us, "Why comest Thou to destroy us?" And at a word from the Master they fled. How shall the evil spirit dare to attack a soul in which Jesus is dwelling?

Often the spirit of evil tempts a soul before communion in order to turn it away from the sacrament; this is a good sign. Have confidence! If your communion was not certain to be fruitful, the devil would take good care not to seek to deter you from it; he would rather urge you to it.

But when Jesus dwells within a soul as on a throne of glory, the demon rarely dares to approach. Or if he approaches—for he is incredibly bold: did he not attack Jesus Himself in the wilderness?—he is without power, and a word from Jesus puts him to flight or disconcerts him.

The fear which the devil feels for a soul in possession of its God exists not only at the precise moment of communion, but persists long afterwards; we may say as long as the fragrance of the presence of Jesus persists in the soul. "The enemy is terrified," says St. Peter Damian, "when he sees the lips of Christians empurpled with the divine blood." Thus the devil, if not always driven away by communion, is at least reduced to impotence.

But temptation may also come from you yourselves, and from that depth of malice and perverse instincts which the Church calls concupiscence, which habitual grace diminishes but does not destroy. Here again communion is of great help.

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It weakens the temptation; sometimes it altogether suppresses it. It acts as a sedative, which deadens the evil; or a miraculous balm, which soothes the wound; or a marvellous remedy, which heals the sore.

All the theologians are agreed in recognising this effect of communion upon the passions. It moderates their violence; it appeases the tumult; it purifies the soul.

It is related that an Irish saint, the Abbot Senan, wishing to procure the benefit of communion for St. Bridget, who dwelt retired on a desert island, formed a raft of a few branches, surrounded it with flowers, and placed the sacred host upon it in a coffer. Then he placed the divine freight on the sea and left it to the mercy of the winds. It travelled rapidly over the waters, as though sped by some invisible pilot; it passed through the midst of rocks; it miraculously escaped all dangers; the subject waves shrank and grew calm before it. And the frail vessel with its celestial Passenger presently reached the shore where Bridget in adoration awaited it, where she received it with overflowing gratitude and love.

This raft is a symbol of yourself. The raging sea is the sea of your passions. The shore on which the saints await you is Eternity. Bearing Jesus in your heart, you behold the most fearful tempests calmed before your passage, and quiet succeeds to the most violent gales.

Nevertheless it would be a mistake to suppose that communion always acts in this manner. The admirable goodness of God has different ways of conducting us to paradise.

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At certain moments God permits that the tempest, instead of being appeased by communion, redoubles its fury. He wishes to try our faith, as He tried that of Peter on the Lake of Genesareth. He wishes also to increase our merits.

Do not forget that conflict is our normal state upon this earth, and that

“To conquer without peril is to triumph without glory: Life is a conflict, whereof the palm is given in heaven.”

Communion manifests its power all the more clearly when it gives us strength to overcome our passions rather than to calm them. It is more difficult, more meritorious to triumph over the storm than to avoid it. Also Jesus, for His glory, for our advancement, for our greater welfare, often wishes that we should, like Peter, advance upon the angry waters, amidst the hissing of the tempest and the buffets of the waves. But then He is there to ensure our steps, to save us from sinking, to act Himself as our support, in case of need to bear us in His arms.

There is no passion, however formidable, which you cannot overcome with the help of Holy Communion; for one of its certain effects is an increase of courage for resisting and of strength for combating.

And consider well that communion does not merely give you actual grace for the moment, I mean during the time of the Real Presence; it gives you the right to an increase of grace in proportion to the nature and the intensity of the temptation for the hour when it assails you. It is, in fact, as the Council of Trent tells us,

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“an antidote” against poison; and when the violent access of the fever of the passions recommences, Jesus comes to your aid as the divine Physician, to succour you in your distress.

Does a temptation present itself to you on the day of communion? On account of your communion and by its virtue you have a special grace of resistance that you would not otherwise have had. Communion is efficacious not only for the present, but for the future; and actual grace descends more abundantly in the hour of need to succour the soul that has received its God.

If it happens—and you sometimes acknowledge it—that you are less good on a day of communion, it is not God whom you must reproach. Usually the contrary is true; the experience of confessors and your own will attest as much. When a communion has been well made the day is better for it.

It may also happen that on certain days of communion more violent temptations will assail you, and that even in giving way to them you have, after all, displayed more courage than you would have shown without the special effect of communion. Moreover, if you fall you will not fall so far, and you will the sooner recover yourself.

However it may be, do not ever be discouraged; and believe firmly, since faith positively teaches you this, that each communion corresponds with a real increase of actual grace and a future right to those same graces in the hour of temptation.

The actual grace of communion is not merely given you to diminish your temptations or aid you to overcome them. That is in a sense only

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a negative effect. There is an effect which is more beautiful and of a more positive nature. The actual graces which proceed from communion assist you to acquire perfection, and to walk in the path that leads to holiness.

Do not forget that the Eucharist was especially instituted to give life. Jesus incessantly repeats this in that incomparable chapter of the Gospel of St. John in which He announces to the Jews and to His apostles this divine mystery: "I am the bread of life; the bread which cometh down from heaven. The bread that I will give is My flesh for the life of the world. Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you shall not have life within you."

And was it not to express His thought in a more striking manner that the divine Master instituted the Eucharist in the form of bread and wine?

Then, one of the essential effects of communion is to increase within us supernatural life. But supernatural life, like natural life, has need, in order to increase, of the exercise of the virtues constituting it; and communion gives precisely the abundance of actual grace needed for the daily practice of these virtues.

How will you attain patience, humility, renunciation and self-forgetfulness, charity, goodness and true love, the love of God for Himself, disinterested love?

To attain them your efforts are undoubtedly necessary. But grace is still more necessary; and, moreover, without grace you would be incapable of the efforts you must make. Already, with all the help that grace gives you, it is difficult

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enough to advance. What, then, would you do without grace?

Now, where will you find a more abundant source of actual graces for the daily practice of Christian virtues than in Holy Communion? Elsewhere is a drop of water, a drop of dew; here is the abundant rain, the spring itself, the ocean!

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Ah, if you would communicate in this spirit! If you should say to yourself: The Eucharist is the shield that no weapon of the adversary can penetrate, the impregnable fortress, the tower of ivory, the safeguard against the most formidable assaults of all the passions and all the demons of hell united!

If you would say to yourselves: The Eucharist is the source of life, the divine reservoir of all the graces of union with God, of sanctity and perfection; the heavenly strength which causes the dawn and growth of all the virtues and of all heroism!

If you could really see in communion, as the Church teaches you, Jesus Himself, in the double reality of His divinity and His humanity; Jesus, who therein takes on a new life and a new birth for you, especially for you; Jesus, who comes to you as if you were the only creature in the universe; Jesus, who opens His heart, His soul, His life, His sacred wounds, all the treasures of His grace, His omnipotence, and His love; Jesus, who loves you in so great a degree that no love in this world, however sublime, however beyond the bounds of reason, can give you any idea of it; Jesus, who longs to heal you, to sanctify you, to defend and deliver you, to increase all your

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virtues, to inspire you with holiness, make you divine, unite Himself to you and you to Him, henceforth be one with you !

In a word, if you were to come to communion with faith—I do not say with a faith made up of imagination and sensibility, for that does not depend on you and, moreover, is not necessary,—but with a genuine faith, profound and supernatural, that faith quickened and ennobled by the love which the apostles begged of the divine Master ; oh ! then, I do not fear to assert, your communions would produce within your souls prodigious and incalculable effects, of which God alone could measure the true value.

There exist on the face of the earth privileged climates, favoured regions. The sun is warmer there, the air purer, water more abundant, the soil more fertile. An extraordinary, luxuriant vegetation covers the ground ; and the amazed traveller marvels at this intensity of production and of life ; he himself profits thereby, and the blood circulates more generously in his veins.

This is a faint image, a pale reflection of what I would wish to say to you, and of what really takes place in the soul that communicates with fervour.

What a bright, pure, profound radiance would glow within that soul ! With what life-giving rays would it be warmed and made fruitful !

What streams of grace would unceasingly flow therein ! What virtues would delight the eye ! What a harvest of good works would multiply there for the good of all !

What marvellous harmonies would resound there day and night, to rejoice the earth and

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ravish the heavens, for the delight and improvement of men and the glory of God !

This soul, transformed, sanctified, made divine by communion, may be your own when you so desire ! Jesus wishes it with all the strength of His sovereign will, all the intensity of His love, overflowing with tenderness and generosity. It is therefore sufficient for you to say in your turn: " I also wish it " ; and immediately it shall be so ! Then the angels above, jealous—if that could be—of such happiness, or rather ravished by the beauty of your soul and the glory you will give to God, will sing to the heavens: Alleluia !

CHAPTER VI

SPECIAL EFFECTS OF COMMUNION: GRACES OF LOVE AND UNION WITH JESUS CHRIST

"I live; now not I, but Christ liveth in me."—
Gal. ii. 20.

WE have shown how communion heals the infirmities of the soul, and how it gives at one and the same time actual grace and sanctifying grace, in a special and wonderful abundance. What further can it do? Does it not seem that all has surely been told?

Yet we have still to explain what is most important and most divine therein, that which essentially belongs to the Eucharist.

All the sacraments contain sanctifying and actual grace. Without doubt the Eucharist is the source of grace, and bestows it upon us in an unsurpassed abundance; here already is a point that we must not overlook. But is there nothing more? Is there not something peculiar in the grace which the Eucharist bestows upon us? Yes, there is, and this is the point we must elucidate; by considering firstly, what kind of grace communion brings to us, and, secondly, what union it establishes between our Lord Jesus Christ and ourselves.

The words of St. Thomas relative to the Blessed Sacrament are golden, and teach us

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more concerning its effects within the soul than whole volumes.

Communion, according to the holy doctor, confers grace upon us with the virtue of charity. Let us stop to ponder on this thought.

Charity, in the sense which St. Thomas here gives it—the love of God for Himself—is of all supernatural virtues the most eminent. We may say that it is the essence of holiness.

In truth there is no real virtue without love. Faith and hope themselves—necessary and exalted virtues though they be—are without love but dead virtues, as theology calls them; that is, virtues which are no longer virtues; bodies without souls. No virtue is of any value or is really a supernatural virtue except by love; by that higher love which is not merely the love of God on account of His favours, but disinterested love, the love of God because God is supremely lovable in Himself and supremely perfect; in a word, the love of charity.

The love of charity is the essence and life-blood of virtue and holiness. Where it is found all is pleasing to God; where it is absent nothing can please Him.

Moreover, the love of charity has two precious qualities; precious above all from the point of view of the soul's progress. It takes sovereign possession of the heart and thereby draws all things after it. The heart is master within us, and as love is master of the heart it becomes at the same time master of all the other powers of the soul.

In the second place, it is the peculiarity of love to make all things easy. What seems a cross of lead to him that does not love is only

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a cross of straw to him that loves. Love is thus the swiftest means, the surest, and the sweetest, of leading us to perfection.

Now, according to St. Thomas, the peculiar effect of communion consists precisely in increasing and transforming into action and practice the habitual charity which is already within us; it consists in making us produce more frequent and more intense acts of love.

God is truth, beauty, holiness, power, wisdom. But God is, above all, love. And it is especially in the form of love that He communicates Himself to us in Holy Communion.

Indeed, the Eucharist is the supreme effort of divine love; it is its consummation. Its end is the sovereign expression and full manifestation and satisfaction of divine love, and by that very fact the most abundant gift to us of that love.

We might say that all the love of God has flowed into the heart of the Incarnate Word, and that all the love of the Incarnate Word has in its turn flowed into the Eucharist. By communion the heart of Jesus, the home and sanctuary of the divine love, enters into our own hearts to warm them by contact with His, and to kindle within them those eternal flames of charity with which He Himself for ever glows.

Thus not only is habitual charity increased in us by communion, but it is awakened and stimulated to action, and bestows upon us the immeasurable graces of love: that is the essential effect of communion in our souls. What a mighty aid to progress in perfection and sanctity, since both consist only in love!

Finally, to leave nothing unsaid in dealing with this question of the love given by communion,

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it is not infrequent that sensible effects are added to the rest; indeed, theologians speak of these as of a normal result of communion. "In addition to grace," says Viva, "the Holy Eucharist procures us the devotion and fervour of charity; together with a sweetness, joy, and spiritual delight of a wholly special nature. Such," he adds, "is the ordinary teaching of theologians, according to St. Thomas and Suarez. And the reason is this: just as corporal nourishment does not nourish merely, but procures a certain satisfaction, so is it with spiritual nourishment. The latter is symbolised by the manna, which had all kinds of delicious flavours. Thus it floods the soul with a torrent of tenderness which overflows even into the body, so that both the spirit and the flesh rejoice in the living God!" Thus speaks Viva, and all theology with him.

This sensible fervour has great influence over you. Often you mourn that you do not feel it. You are at such times depressed, discouraged. You long to feel the love of God.

Instead of increasing with years, this sensible fervour tends, on the contrary, to decrease. As you advance in age your hearts become colder, you lose your enthusiasms, and your feelings become less vivid. It seems as though the fire of your soul is extinguished; as though nothing but ashes remain.

Here is the means of relighting this spiritual fire; the means of restoring to your fervour the effusion and the ardour it knew of old—make good communions! After a good communion how often have you not felt lifted up out of yourselves, as though you had been given wings! How often have you not been overjoyed to

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discover in yourselves powers of loving that you had not even suspected ! This was the sacramental grace of communion acting in you. It was this that caused St. John Chrysostom to exclaim: " In returning from the holy table we are as lions whose breath is fire."

In the divine intimacy of communion the soul eats, drinks, and becomes enraptured with love; it bathes in love, and emerges refreshed, flooded with joy, penetrated with the sweetness of divine goodness, radiant with happiness.

The Curé d'Ars, so exhausted with fasting and austerities and fatigue, was transfigured when he came from communion, assuming that expression of happiness and ecstasy that has been immortalised by sculpture.

God does not confer upon us the same graces as upon the saints, but we may hope to receive at least some crumbs of the royal banquet with which He is pleased to serve them.

Such is the special nature of the graces conferred upon us by communion.

In the second place, what union does communion establish between ourselves and Christ ?

To understand the answer to this question we must remember this principle: that all grace, of whatever nature and by whatever means it reaches us, is given to us by the humanity of Jesus.

God is indeed the Author and the sovereign Master of grace. He can distribute it when and as He pleases. Grace is a new and genuine creation in our souls. Just as in the beginning God created the world by a word, so by a word He could create grace in our souls.

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But God has preferred to act otherwise. He has willed that the humanity of Jesus should be not only the meritorious cause of grace, but also the efficient cause. Jesus has merited grace on our behalf by His virtues, His prayers, and His sufferings; and it is also Jesus who gives us grace, and it is He who introduces it into our souls by His humanity, as by a sublime and marvellous instrument.

All grace, then, comes from Jesus, and every time that a priest administers a sacrament it is not only Jesus that administers it, but it is Jesus who acts in the sacrament; the sacrament is His own act.

When the crowd was pressing about our Saviour and a miracle was produced by His mere contact, He felt "that virtue had gone out of Him." Grace issues from Him, from His holy humanity, at once merited and produced thereby—produced, that is, by His divinity, which is inseparable from His humanity and which makes use of it as if an instrument.

This being so, can we fail to realise the special and pre-eminent virtue of communion? By communion the humanity of the Word is really brought into direct and immediate contact with ours. In what measure, then, shall we not receive grace, since we touch the very cause which produces it?

Plunge a bar of iron into the fire until it is red-hot. Then hold your hand near the iron. You will feel the heat, certainly; but if you were to lay the iron on your hand, what a difference!

By means of the sacraments we approach the sacred humanity of the Word; by communion we enter into contact with it.

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We are like children sucking in life on their mothers' breasts; our lips cleave to the divine and inexhaustible source of all graces, and we may drink them in long draughts.

Moreover, in what condition is this humanity of the Word by whose means we receive such a plenitude of grace? In the condition of a sacrificed victim.

The Eucharist produces all the phases of the life of Jesus: His infancy, His youth, His sorrowful life, and His resurrection and glorious life. But it is none the less true that it was especially instituted to renew His death and sacrifice on Calvary. The Eucharist, therefore, is on the altar during mass essentially as a sacrifice.

Now, if the humanity of the Word has merited a supreme abundance of grace for us by all the actions of His life, He has merited it yet more by His immolation on the cross.

And it is Jesus in this condition of sacrificial victim that we receive in communion. He continues, renews, and consummates within us His actual death by a mystic death. "Whenever you eat of this bread," says St. Paul, "you announce the death of our Lord."

How, then, shall we describe the immensity of the graces conferred upon you? You are not merely at the source of grace; you are, if one may say so—for comparisons are needful to express these sublime thoughts and these truths which are so far above us—you are where the source is hottest, most swiftly moving, and most life-giving. Oh, precious moment! Who will ever be able to tell what passes between Jesus and the soul in communion? Who can speak worthily of "that moment of happiness and

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delight when the bride is on the heart of the celestial Spouse, when she but lives and breathes by Him"?*

Far more—in communion our humanity and the humanity of Jesus are not only in contact but in union, a kind of fusion; as when cold water is poured into boiling water. In this way we receive grace in an inexpressible abundance.

This union with the humanity of the Word, in so far as it is sacramental, is of short duration. But when the sacramental union, properly speaking, has ceased, when the body and blood of Christ contained in the host have disappeared, is there not an enduring union, a special residence of Jesus in the soul, a life of Jesus within us which persists as a permanent result of communion?

Yes, this ardent desire within our hearts was the still more ardent desire of the heart of Jesus, and He has satisfied it. There is an actual and particular presence of Jesus, which persists after the disappearance of the sacramental species, and in the following manner:

No title so well becomes the soul, at the moment of communion, as that of the spouse of Jesus. Theologians have written at length to prove that in the Blessed Sacrament Jesus does really espouse the soul which He loves and to which He gives Himself.

Now, in the sacrament of marriage the union between husband and wife does not cease after the rite is accomplished, but continues as long as life itself. Death alone has power to break it, and even death does not break it entirely; for although it leaves the survivor free to

* P. Grou, "*Manuel des âmes intérieures*."

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contract another marriage the moral union remains eternal.

It is the same in communion. The union between Jesus and the soul lasts as long as life. Mortal sin, which is the death of the soul, alone can break it; and even then the soul retains the right to return to Jesus.

This comparison will give us some idea of the relation of the soul to Jesus in Holy Communion.

And, further, Jesus has said: "He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, abideth in Me and I in him. As I live by the Father, so he that eateth Me, the same also shall live by Me." Jesus here speaks of remaining unceasingly within us and of a fusion of two lives in one; and this is farther-reaching than the conjugal tie.

Let us then say, with the most authoritative of the theologians, that after the disappearance of the sacramental species the divinity of the Word dwells in us by some particular and permanent mode of union, in addition to the union that confers grace. The divine Word dwells within our soul, enlightening our spirit, purifying our thoughts, our feelings, and our heart, penetrating all our actions. It is like the fire on the hearth in winter, which gives us light and warmth and courage. What an inestimable gift! What an incomparable blessing! What a union is this! And I repeat, it is a question of a union that will not pass, but is permanent and definitive!

Many theologians have gone still further, without ever having been rebuked by the Church. This is their teaching:

Communion is peculiarly the union of our soul with the humanity of Jesus. But the humanity

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of Jesus is quickened by His soul, as with us the body is quickened by the soul. Communion therefore establishes a special and permanent union between the soul of Jesus and our own. After the sacred host is consumed the soul of Jesus remains within us, united to us, as at the moment of communion, and continues to operate in us and by us.

The Gospel often speaks of those that were possessed; and such have been seen in all ages; we meet with them to-day. God has given to evil spirits the power not only to tempt us, but the truly extraordinary power of so mastering a man as to force him to give vent to the demon's own thoughts. He can inspire him with his feelings, compel him to execute all manner of physical movements, and can provoke the most terrible expressions upon his countenance.

Now, it was said long ago that the demon is the ape of God. He imitates God in his own way; he does for his own cause what God does for His.

If, therefore, there are undoubted phenomena of diabolic possession, why should there not be a divine possession in the case of souls beloved by God who give themselves to Him in communion? Would not the soul of Jesus have infinitely more power than a fallen spirit to take possession of a Christian soul, to possess it wholly, and to substitute, in place of its sentiments, thoughts, and actions, His own divine activities?

Is not this the object of holiness? Was it not affirmed by St. Paul? The great apostle hopes that "the life of Jesus may be made manifest in our mortal body," and he cries: "My life is Christ. I live, but it is no longer I; it is the Christ that lives in me."

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What does this mean if not that the soul of Jesus is substituted for mine, and dwells in mine, so that mine no longer lives alone, but that His soul lives in mine?

The Scriptures constantly speak as though the life of Jesus should replace our own, and the saints speak in the same manner. They say, with St. Francis of Sales, that when one has communicated "one has Jesus in one's mind, in one's heart, in one's hands." And in their opinion the effect referred to is permanent. How should this be if not by a permanent and continuous union of the soul of Jesus with our own?

"Oh, how amiable is Thy love, sweetest Lord Jesus!" cried St. Bonaventure. "Thou canst not bear to be separated from us. . . . Thou hast wished to incorporate us perfectly with Thy body, to give us Thy blood to drink, so that enraptured with Thy love we should no longer have but one heart and one soul with Thee, and that this soul should be inseparably mingled with Thy soul. Without doubt this is Thy object and Thy desire, O my God!"

The permanent effect of communion, then, consists in the union, not figurative, but real and continuous, of the soul of Jesus with our own. So long as we remain in a state of grace the spirit of Jesus dwells within us. It penetrates us, animates and transforms us. It takes possession of our whole nature, all our abilities and all our faculties; it thinks with our brain, loves with our heart, acts by our will, and in our every movement.

We live no longer; Jesus lives in us; the words of the apostle are not a pious exaggeration,

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a figure of speech, but the very expression of the reality as it affects every soul that surrenders itself to the soul of Jesus in communion, to the point of being really and truly possessed by His.

When Joan of Arc arrived before the fortress of Tourelles, then occupied by the English, she said something sublime, incredibly bold, and which one would have called insane had not God inspired her. Turning to the officers and men who followed her, but who, already discouraged, were on the point of flight, she showed them the fortress guarded by the enemy: "Enter," she told them; "enter, all is yours." And they did enter, and all was theirs !

Divinity is a citadel impregnable to all our human might. Sin cast us forth from the bosom of God, from the heavenly city; and thenceforth the gate was closed to us.

But Jesus, our liberator, our Saviour, comes to us in the Eucharist: He lowers, in a sense, the divinity; He brings it nearer to us; He shows it to us; He leads us to it, and says: "Enter now, for all is yours ! My divinity and My humanity, My body and My blood, My soul and My life, My treasures and My merits—all that I have, all that I possess, all is yours ! Enter fearlessly and you will be at home !"

What Christian is there that, moved by such magnanimity, would not reply to the Saviour by a cry of generous love, saying to Him:

"Ah, Lord, come in Your turn, do You also come into my soul, for all is Yours !" Yes, all ! "For since You have kept back nothing, neither would I keep anything from You. My spirit and my heart, my imagination and my

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memory, my will and my feelings, my body and my senses, my soul and my life, my thoughts, my words and actions, my merits, my atonements, and my intentions: what am I saying? —My Saviour, since You wish it, even my sins, my offences, and my negligence, my spiritual imperfections and my moral poverty, my selfishness and cowardice, my doubts and my indifference, my downfalls and my disgraces: all that I deplore, O Jesus, O Infinite Goodness, O inexhaustible mercy, O sovereign love, all is Yours! Come, O come and dispose of all according to Your adorable will!

“Purify that which is impure, wash that which is soiled, water that which is dry and barren, heal that which is sick and wounded, soften that which is hard and unyielding, warm that which is cold, straighten that which is crooked, make holier that which is already holy, and give an intenser life to that which is living! May the far-reaching fragrance of Your divinity penetrate all and mingle with all! May Your blood be diffused with mine! May Your flesh be mingled with my flesh! May Your soul live in my soul!

“Accept, I implore You, all this that I give You! Accept it now, for it may be that to-morrow I shall be too weak and too cowardly to offer it to You! And take, take by force and authority, all that I might still refuse You!

“Ah, merciful Lord, bountiful and good beyond all that I can conceive, come, pray come! May all within me be truly Yours! May I live no longer for myself and by myself; but may You alone live within me, now and for ever, to-day upon earth and to-morrow in heaven!”

CHAPTER VII

OBSTACLES TO THE GRACES OF COMMUNION

“Who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord: or who shall stand in His holy place? The innocent in hands and clean of heart.”—*Ps.* xxiv. 3, 4.

IF Holy Communion produces the marvellous and truly incomparable effects which we have shown, how is it that there are so many persons who communicate often and yet become no better and no holier, but remain indifferent Christians, egoistical, selfish, attached to themselves and their own comfort, as well as to the things of this world; not setting the example they should, little zealous of perfection, lukewarm, or worse, to the interests of God and the Church? Shall we not, wondering, ask how it is that so much accumulated grace can produce such poor results?

It is because there are (1) obstacles to the fruits of communion; and (2) especial dispositions required to gather these same fruits. In this chapter we will confine our attention to the obstacles which prevent communion from producing its full effects.

These obstacles are of two sorts: namely, sin and the lack of upright intention. To remove them we must have innocence of life and purity of intention. “Who shall ascend

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the hill of the Lord"—who shall stand in the place where He dwells, with all His holiness? "He that hath clean hands" (that is, he whose actions and life are clean) "and a pure heart" (that is, pure intentions).

The chief obstacle to the fruits of communion is sin: mortal or venial.

Need we speak here of mortal sin? The Eucharist is a sacrament for the living. One does not give bread to the dead; it would be folly, or bitter irony. In communion it would be an appalling crime. "He that commits it," says St. Paul, "eats and drinks his judgment." What terrible words! What one has eaten and drunk one assimilates, incorporates; it becomes part of one's flesh and blood. How escape from it?

But all things are possible with God, and there is pardon even for sacrilege, however often repeated. Do not forget to tell children this when you teach them the catechism, or the poor when you instruct them. While inspiring them with the utmost horror of a sacrilegious communion, assure them that this sin can always be pardoned, however grave it has been rendered by its frequency and the malice with which it has been committed.

As to venial sin, the question is far more complex. In itself it is not an obstacle to the fruits of communion, or rather it is only a relative obstacle. And here we must enter into detailed explanations, for nothing more closely concerns the inward and daily forces of spiritual life.

In the first place, a venial sin may be committed at the very moment of communion, as

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happens when a person communicates with wilful distractions and negligence. Even in this case communion produces certain effects; the soul receives an increase of habitual grace, so great is the goodness of God !

But the fruits of communion are considerably diminished. There is even irreverence towards our Lord Jesus Christ, and a special sin, not only on account of the act itself, but on account of the moment at which it is committed. This is evidently a very great misfortune and a very great loss to the communicant.

Let us now consider the venial sins committed during the course of one's life, outside the moment of communion.

We must distinguish the act of sin, the habit of sin, and the affection for sin.

Sin is a guilty act which proceeds from the will. So long as this act is not withdrawn by contrition and effaced by pardon it persists in the eyes of God. On the other hand, the moment it is pardoned the sin in itself ceases to be.

Habit is something that attaches itself to you, inoculates you, and becomes a propensity towards and a facility for recommencing. It is a fatal inclination, which remains even when the act is past, even when the sin is effaced. There is about it something physical, independent of your will and your liberty, which persists in spite of you. You would willingly rid yourself of it, but the effort would be all but impossible.

It follows from this that although the habit is guilty in the cause which has produced it, that is in the sin which has engendered it, it is not guilty in itself. Thus you may retain an

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inclination, even a violent inclination, to mortal sin, and yet you may be in a state of grace and the habit produce no actual fault. This is all the more true of a habit of venial sin.

Habit pushes us toward sin and tends to engender it; but it is distinct from the sin; in itself it is not a sin. You may detest vanity, impatience, idleness, and the love of ease; and yet they may have produced in you strong habits, to which you sometimes yield.

But inversely you may love your habits and your sins, remaining voluntarily attached to them. This is what we call affection for sin, or the habit of sin: and it is this which constitutes the lack of contrition.

The struggle against habit or the absence of this struggle is one of the principal signs which characterise the affection or the lack of affection for sin and the habit of sin.

If, having no habitual affection for sin, you make an effort not to fall into it, and if nevertheless you do fall into it, then it is what we call a sin of frailty. If, on the other hand, being attached to sin, you deliberately allow yourself to be drawn into it instead of striving against it, then it is called a sin of deliberate intention.

The difference between the two cases is considerable and obvious.

In the first case the consent of the will to evil is momentary, rapid, unpremeditated, instantaneous; sometimes it is even incomplete, and mingled with contrition and regret; it is in a sense denied even as it is accorded.

In the second case, on the contrary, consent is already long existent; persisting, calculated, well considered, and fully intended, without

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slightest regret for the past or the present or resolution for the future. The will is wholly disordered; the capitulation is complete; sin is truly master of the will, which no longer even seeks to shake off the yoke.

Here are a few characteristic traits of such persons as have an affection for venial sin in general. They say: "Provided I get to heaven, that is enough for me." Purgatory does not count for them. They scarcely take venial sin into account; they commit it coldly and without scruple. Habits of impatience, evil speaking and idleness, frivolous reading, and unworthy dreams have taken possession of their hearts and lives, and sway them completely without resistance on their part. They do not even try to react. They blind themselves to all these faults and distort their consciences in order to preserve their peace of mind. Perhaps they still accuse themselves in confession, but in a very general manner, rapidly, without attaching any importance to the offence, and without contrition, as a mere matter of form and routine.

This condition, in short, is what we call lukewarmness; it exists in various degrees. The will ceases to struggle against venial sin; it abandons the conflict by deliberate intention and willingly surrenders to the enemy.

It is possible that this state of soul which we have just described applies only to certain classes of sin. Some behave thus in regard to evil speaking; others in regard to vanity; others in regard to this or that venial sin. The evil is more serious as it is more extensive and as it embraces more different kinds of faults. If it applies to each venial sin in a general way, what-

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ever it may be, it signifies the complete and absolute lack of zeal.

On the other hand, there are persons subject to numerous and sometimes violent temptations, solicited by constant opportunities of sin, oppressed by the habits of venial faults, habits which are deeply rooted, extremely tenacious, and impulsive; and such persons may even very frequently succumb to these habits. Yet, in spite of all, they try seriously to avoid occasions of danger, to resist temptation when it offers, and to rise again as often as they fall. Their consent to the sin is never absolute. They commit it by surprise, as it were, and are miserable the moment they see what they have done; very often even they are filled with regret at the very moment of sinning, so that they do not so much fall as seem to fall; they hardly touch the ground.

It is obvious that there is a gulf between these two classes of persons, and although the external effects may be almost similar, it would be profoundly erroneous and unjust to confuse the two categories.

This explains how it is that the Fathers of the Church speak so very differently on the subject of venial sin—to the point sometimes of seeming to contradict themselves. St. Augustine teaches that venial sins should not prevent us from communicating; and the same saint tells us that venial sin is a shameful leprosy which excites the disgust of our Saviour. St. Bonaventure urges us not to approach communion in a lukewarm manner; and elsewhere he says: “Approach, even though you be lukewarm.”

Both, therefore, clearly distinguish, concerning venial sin and lukewarmness, two states

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of soul which are widely different from one another, one being a state of intention and consent, and the other a state of denial and rejection by the will.

Now that we understand these principles let us apply them to communion, and consider what is an obstacle and what is not.

Venial sin, however frequent and complex, cannot in itself be an obstacle to the graces and fruits of communion.

Indeed, the Council of Trent declares that the holy sacrament is "an antidote which delivers us from our daily sins," and the Catechism of the Council teaches that venial sins are redeemed and pardoned by the Holy Eucharist. It takes for granted that this is one of the objects of the sacrament, and compares its action to that of nourishment, which repairs the daily losses of the organic tissues.

It is also certain that communion produces an increase of charity within us, not only habitual but actual charity, which combats the inclination to venial sin and tends to destroy it.

What we lack most is love, above all love in practice and in action, for it exists substantially in our souls by reason of the state of grace. Now Jesus, on entering our hearts, makes this love leap forth at His divine touch as one makes a spark leap from flint. Or, if you prefer it, our soul is a harp which only awaits the touch of the divine hand in order to vibrate. Jesus comes, and the strings resound; our soul awakens and sings the canticle of divine love, which puts sin to flight and overcomes all our perverse inclinations.

To speak plainly, communion acts on our

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venial sins in such a way as to efface them, and on our habits so as to destroy them. These perverse inclinations, perhaps of long standing and deeply rooted in our nature, are sought out by communion in the secret recesses of our hearts, in order that it may tear them out and remove even the slightest traces of them.

All these marvels communion works of itself and by its own virtue. Therefore venial sins, and even the habit of these sins, cannot act as obstacles to the graces and the fruits of communion.

But that which diminishes the fruits of communion is the affection for venial sin.

However powerful and abundant the graces of communion, the free attachment of the will to evil prevents them from bearing fruit in the soul. For although grace could overcome your liberty if God so willed it, it never does so, for the reason that God does not will it.

“I stand at the door and knock;” this, as recorded by Scripture, is the part of God, and of grace. By means of communion grace arrives at the door of the soul, but there it stops as before an impregnable barrier. It is for you to remove that barrier. God entreats you to do so; He asks you most earnestly; He does not merely wait at the door, He knocks; one might say that He knocks again and again; or, better still, that His voice grows gentle, pleading, inexpressibly persuasive. It seems as though God were pleading for Himself rather than for you; that it is He who has need of you, and you who are about to do Him a service. Impossible to carry delicacy and generosity farther, is it not inconceivable on the part of God? We might

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say with St. Paul, who said it of the cross: "Is it not folly? The sublime divine folly of love! To give all and to seem to receive all!"

But that which follows lies with you. Open the door, remove the obstacle—that is your part; that is what remains for you to do. Before he raised Lazarus Jesus said to Mary Magdalen: "Roll away the stone." It is for you to remove the stone which closes the entrance of your soul, otherwise grace will bear no fruits and no marvels will be accomplished.

Now the stone, the obstacle, is the voluntary attachment to sin; the affection that your heart freely entertains for evil. Grace will help you to roll this obstacle away; but you must help grace, for it can do nothing without your assistance.

The firmer and more generous the determination to rid yourself of sin and all its deplorable habits, the further it will extend, reaching all your ordinary sins and each particular sin, and the more abundant will be the fruits of communion. We may say that at each communion sacramental grace and all the special graces of the Eucharist will blossom in your soul in the measure which you yourself make possible. And this measure will depend upon the sincere regret you may feel for your sins, and your firm determination to oppose them by a permanent and earnest struggle.*

We must now speak of the second obstacle to the effects of communion: the lack of upright intention.

How can we be wanting in purity of intention in communicating? For what other motive

* See Chapter XII.

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than for the sake of God is it possible to communicate ?

Alas ! human nature is so frail and the demon so cunning that both intention and motive may be unworthy. Good intentions will insensibly go astray, and it is possible to mingle, in communion, intentions which are perfectly upright with others that are no longer so. We may, for instance, pretend to a certain superiority of which God alone is no longer the cause, but which has grown too human. We may desire to do better than so-and-so. Perhaps we wish to increase the esteem of our confessor, and for that reason communicate more frequently.

God is jealous of His glory, and He is exacting—as He has the right to be—of the privileged souls whom He admits to His intimacy. The least blemish upon these souls offends His sight. Do not complain that this is so—you would complain of being too greatly loved. But be vigilant, as delicate and tender as is in your power, and strive to carry your purity of intention to the highest degree of which you are capable.

Need you be reminded that it is not an exaggerated and much less a scrupulous analysis of your conscience, but solely simplicity, the thought of God and of God alone, that will lead you, and with no delay, to this perfect purity and uprightness of intention ? And this will throw the doors of your soul wide open to the graces of God.

The purer and more upright your intention, the more abundant the fruits which you will gather from your communion.

If, on the other hand, your intention were to

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cease to be upright, you would not be committing sacrilege, not being in a state of mortal sin, but you would make a lukewarm communion. This would be a deliberate abuse of grace, which might lead you to lose all reverence for God and sacred matters, and become the source of disaster to your spiritual life. It is impossible to guard too carefully against communions made in such a state of deliberate and culpable indifference.*

When you visit the poor, taking a few presents with you, how hearts and faces brighten, and with what joy you are welcomed !

Imagine changing places with some poor woman and carry it to an extreme. Suppose that you, your husband, and your children are in a state of destitution and misery. To crown your misfortunes, sickness has found its way into your midst and is causing sad havoc. Health is impaired; life is in danger. No money, no bread, no medicine, and scarcely clothing. It is the combination of sickness and poverty in all its horror, accompanied by despair.

Of a sudden the door opens, and an unexpected benefactor appears. His hands are full; he brings wealth, health, life, hope !

How will you receive him ? And if in return for his favours he asks of you some sacrifice, imposes some condition, even if it is difficult, will you refuse—will you refuse him anything ? Would you find anything too much to give in return for such generosity ?

* See Chapter XII.

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Now, you and yours are poor, sick, infirm; left to yourself you would be without hope. But here is the divine benefactor, Jesus, who comes to you with full hands. What does He bring you? Health of spirit, of heart, of soul! Eternal and imperishable wealth; His own life, the very life of God! Infinite hope! A happiness beyond that which you could ever imagine!

How are you going to receive Him? Will not you say to Him: "O my only benefactor, O divine Saviour, O wealth of my soul, O delight of my heart, O happiness of my life, O my all, O my unique all! ask of me what Thou wilt, and I will straightway give it Thee; for all that I could give Thee would be as nothing to what Thou hast brought me!"

Rectify, then, your guilty wills, and renounce your habits of sin; condemn, or at least detest them, and form the sincere desire to correct yourself; resolve to struggle against yourself and against all occasions of offending God; repent the moment you have sinned, regret your faults as soon as you have had the misfortune to commit them; and efface them at once—for you can do so—by an act of love and contrition!

Let your intentions be always upright, pure, and without blemish!

And you shall ascend the mountain of the Lord; you shall come unto the place where He resides in the plenitude of His holiness; you shall approach the holy table and receive the sacred body of Jesus, His blood, His spirit, His divinity. Oh! then all the floodgates of heaven will be opened; the divine life will enter into you like a new deluge, to submerge you and

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destroy all that is evil and unclean, leaving only that which is good and holy. Grace will flow to the very brim of your soul, and all the virtues will grow there abundantly. Between you and God there will no longer be an obstacle. He, in truth, rather than you, will have swept away all that was evil. You had only to let Him work His will. He it is really that will have done all and given all; and He will reward you as if you yourself had done and given all !

O marvellous fruits of communion, who would not gather you ? O incomparable effects of communion, who would not wish to see you accomplished in his soul ? O Christians, cast away all obstacles, purify your hearts and your lives, rectify your intentions; and God will work wonders for you ; He will perform miracles in your souls.

CHAPTER VIII

DISPOSITIONS REQUIRED FOR A GOOD COMMUNION. DISTANT PREPARATION

"She hath not eaten her bread idle."—*Prov.* xxxi. 27.

THE possible effects of communion—as we have sufficiently emphasised—are truly incalculable. In every communion there is a superabundance of graces far above all that words can express.

If in practice the fruits of communion are less than they should be, the cause is in the obstacles which grace encounters in the soul. These obstacles come from sin and the habit of sin, and above all from voluntary attachment to sin, or, in other words, lack of contrition.

But to remove the obstacles to the action of communion is not sufficient. You must bring to communion certain dispositions which will also have a considerable influence on the extent of the results you will obtain therefrom.

These dispositions may be divided into three classes: dispositions before, dispositions during, and dispositions after communion. We will speak of them in turn.

Before communion you must prepare yourself—this preparation is of the greatest importance. First we will point out the necessity of preparation, the better to teach the practice of it.

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The necessity of preparing for Holy Communion is obvious. Nevertheless, this preparation has such an effect on the results of communion that we must insist upon its importance.

It is an accepted principle in theology that God does no violence to our liberty, that He does not force the door of our hearts. In communion Jesus comes with the fulness of His graces; He offers them, He presses them upon us, He insists; but ultimately He awaits our answer. All depends upon our dispositions.

To remove the obstacles—mortal sin and venial sin, affection for sin, imperfect intention—this is a first and an important duty, but it necessitates another.

To respond to the signal favour of communion, to derive from it all the fruits with which God has stored it, we ought not to content ourselves with being in a state of grace; we must, if we cannot be perfect, at least wish to be so, and strive seriously to that end. In other words, such dispositions as will not repel grace should not content a generous soul; more positive dispositions are needful, by which grace is attracted and assisted.

For how should the spiritual bread profit a soul ill prepared? Does material bread profit an indisposed stomach?

Communion is essentially spiritual nourishment, whose end is the union of our soul with God; it is a consummation in one, by means of nourishment. "Now," says the apostle, "things visible are the sign of things invisible." The laws which preside over bodily alimentation are the symbols of those which rule the spiritual life and the nourishment which sustains it.

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The Eucharist is principally a food, and the forces which we draw from it, the fruits we derive from it, depend very largely upon the positive dispositions which we bring to it; as the profit derived from material food depends upon the condition of the stomach.

In either case assimilation is necessary; and the degree of assimilation is also the degree of moral or physical profit.

The necessity for preparation is therefore imperative and absolute. Nothing can dispense with this necessity. Without preparation the fruit of communion will be considerably lessened.

What shall this preparation be? Three kinds of preparation are recognised: distant, approaching, and immediate. In this chapter we shall consider only the first.

Do not find fault because we go forward slowly.

When during an excursion we come upon an especially beautiful site we instinctively slacken our pace, or even stop, in order to contemplate the wonders displayed before our eyes. We are unwilling to lose anything; we wish to preserve the spectacle for ever in a remembrance that will not fade.

In our eucharistic journey, as we approach that luminous summit, Holy Communion, that ineffable moment in which Jesus takes possession of our soul, let us slacken our pace, let us look attentively, let us fix in our mind the clear vision of all that we observe.

Distant preparation consists in the way we should live each day, or, if you prefer it, in our

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habitual dispositions, which should be those of wishing to communicate with real profit.

People believe too easily that the best preparation for communion is a good confession, made immediately before proceeding to the holy table, or at least the day before. Certainly confession is excellent as a preliminary preparation. But if you confine yourself to that you are far from doing enough. Moreover, that confession itself is only of value in the light of the preparation which precedes it.

In short, all that we wish to do well we must prepare for long in advance. One does not build a house in a day, nor even furnish an apartment. It takes time for the paint to dry, for the papers and the hangings to be put in place. And if a room has been tainted by foul air or a contagious disease, it must be carefully washed and disinfected.

Your soul is the house into which the divine visitor comes to reside; it must be purified and beautified in advance, and that will require time, the more in that the ornamentation here demanded is not an outward and external covering to the soul. It is the soul itself that must transform itself within, changing its very life and its most intimate dispositions.

The nuptial robe required for the supper of which the Gospel speaks is not a garment that can be assumed hastily at the door on entering, to be carelessly thrown aside on leaving.

For communion it is an interior vestment, an intrinsic quality, of which the soul has need. The mind, the heart, the will, the memory, the imagination, the conscience—the whole being, in short—should be white and pure, all should

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be ready for the great act about to be accomplished. Once again, all this cannot be seen to in a moment. It is a long and gradual labour, only to be accomplished day by day. To profit truly by the bread you are about to eat you must not remain idle. The assiduous labour of daily preparation is indispensable.

This distant preparation—what is it? It consists in doing all that is agreeable to the divine guest whom you expect. When you make ready to receive your friends, or when you wish to give pleasure to your husband and children and show your affection for them on their anniversaries, how do you set to work?

You arrange everything about you, all that touches them, your very mood, in such a way as to please them. Flowers, lights, supper, entertainment, everything is devised for their enjoyment, and according to their tastes and wishes, with which you are familiar.

And that which touches them most, that which fills their hearts with the greatest satisfaction and gratitude, is the fact that in all you have done for them and all the pains you have taken they read your affection for them; they say to themselves: "She has thought of me; she wished to please me; therefore she loves me."

Distant preparation consists in so disposing yourself as most greatly to please Him who is to descend into your heart.

Now, nothing will please Him so much as to find you like Himself; and it is there that the work of preliminary preparation should lead you, thanks to which you will not "eat the bread of idleness."

Jesus has done everything on His side to

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become like you, and to enable Himself to be more completely united to you in communion.

He has assumed your nature; He has assumed your condition; He has passed through suffering, humiliation, and penitence, and has become truly your bread, the bread of your souls.

What will you do in your turn to become like Him? You will strive to imitate Him, to follow His example, to practise the virtues of which He is the model.

If you find that too much is being asked of you, remember that, strive as you will, you can never come near doing for God what He has done for you. Remember that Jesus, in giving Himself, "renders unto each according to his works," so that if you wish to profit by the eucharistic bread you must eat it in labour and not "in idleness."

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To be more precise, we may reduce the work of distant preparation to four points, which should cause you to resemble the divine Saviour.

You should become like Him in mind, in heart, in body and soul, and finally in conscience.

Firstly, as to the resemblance in mind. His spirit turned continually toward heaven; it ascended unceasingly, or rather, it was constantly fixed upon God. In a word, Jesus lived in a state of incomparable recollection; for recollection is the sentiment of the presence of God and a permanent and intimate disposition to return all to Him.

How can you profit by your communions if you do not live in the habit of recollection? During the holy sacrifice of the mass, at the holy table, when Jesus dwells in your heart,

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you are often assailed with distractions. A thousand vain, futile, frivolous, or even evil thoughts fill your imagination and efface the sentiment of the presence of God. On leaving the church, how many times have you not been forced to say: "Alas! I have not prayed"?

Certainly there are involuntary distractions, which sometimes overwhelm and torment even the best disposed souls at the very moment of communion. God permits this to humiliate them, to test them, and still further to increase their merits by forcing them to greater efforts and depriving them of all sensible satisfaction.

But many distractions are voluntary and culpable, if not at the moment at least in respect of previous negligence and lack of habitual recollection. Constant dissipation of the mind and the tendency to allow the thoughts to stray result in the impossibility of recollecting oneself at the required moment. Your mind and imagination, not being subject to discipline at ordinary times, and having formed a habit of continually escaping you, slip away, during communion, from the will which should subject and fix them.

The human soul is not a thing of soft wax, on which different forms may be impressed successively and instantaneously. Time is required for the passage from one disposition to another. Time is required to bring oneself into a certain moral state and establish oneself solidly therein. Any change that is rapid, unforeseen, and sudden usually lacks depth and solidity.

The human soul is like the ocean. When the wind rises on the sea it first of all lightly touches the waves; it does no more than ruffle

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the surface. But little by little the agitation increases and becomes deeper; the waves rise higher, they beat with greater force upon the shore, and finally the storm is unchained. The sea rages.

And when the wind ceases the storm decreases, but slowly. The impulse given lasts a long time yet, and it is hours before the sea is calm again.

Thus it is with the human soul. When the imagination is stirred, when the feelings are exalted, when the fury of the passions is loosed against reason and conscience, do not expect all to return to its normal condition of peace and order in a few minutes.

To be perfectly recollected at the moment of communion you must be recollected in the ordinary course of your life.

May your mind grow like that of Jesus by means of habitual recollection! Then, at the hour of communion, your spirit, turned like His toward God, will be ready to receive the illuminating graces which Jesus will bring to it.

Secondly, strive that your heart may resemble His. His heart was detached; may yours become so! Jesus loved only His Father and our souls; He loved nothing else; or, if He did, He loved it with reference to His Father and our souls. This is detachment.

In the host Jesus carries this to the last extreme, retaining of the things of this world only so much as is absolutely necessary to constitute the sign of the sacrament; that is, the appearance of a little bread.

In order to lose nothing of the fruits of communion, strive to attain detachment of heart! How should one whose heart is attached to a

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thousand trifles, to things of no value that pass, to pleasures purely earthly, be able to taste the pure and delicate satisfactions, the immaterial consolations of communion? How can one whose heart is full of the thoughts and the riches of this world be capable of receiving the joys of heaven?

You complain of dryness during communion. You are insensible, without religious emotion, without hunger or thirst; and you ask why it is. In general, apart from the especial intentions of Providence, the cause is this: that your heart is encumbered with earthly affections, so that there is no place left for God.

"If you knew," says Augustine, "that a great personage was to alight at your house and that there were certain things there of a nature to displease him, would you not take care to see that they had disappeared before his arrival? Thus, when you are to receive Jesus Christ, you must expel from your heart all the earthly affections that you know displease Him."

And St. Alphonsus concludes: "He who aspires to frequent communion must therefore empty his heart of all earthly affection."

Also our Lord said to St. Gertrude: "I demand of thee only that thou comest to receive Me empty of thyself."

And St. Francis of Sales writes in turn: "Holy Communion must be received with the desire and care to rid the heart of all that is displeasing to Him whom we wish to lodge there."

Jesus, in the host, leaves everything to come to you. Is it not just that you should leave everything to go to Him? His heart is entirely

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yours, let yours be entirely His ! Prepare yourself to receive Him by living in habitual singleness of heart !

Again, as a preparation for communion, train yourself to crucify your body and your soul in order to grow more like Jesus.

In communion you receive Jesus in the state of victim. Without doubt "the Christ arisen dies no more; death will never more have empire over Him." Jesus, in the Eucharist, is glorious and resuscitated. Nevertheless, as we have already seen, by an unfathomable mystery and a miracle of His omnipotence and love, He is, on the altar as on Calvary, crucified and sacrificed. Communion is a participation in the sacrifice of the mass by the manducation of the victim.

Since, therefore, you receive Jesus in the state of victim, Jesus sacrificed and crucified, you ought every day to sacrifice and crucify yourself, in order to be more like Him and the better to prepare yourself to receive Him. You should crucify your body by mortification and your soul by renunciation.

Persons forever trying to escape from bodily suffering, to avoid all physical pain, and especially those that eagerly seek material enjoyment—even if they do not go so far as gravely to offend God; persons who have not learned to crucify their spirit by humility and the avoidance of all curiosity, nor their will by obedience, renunciation, and submission in bearing trials;—all these unmortified souls, even though they should live without mortal sin, will be forever deprived of many of the graces of communion, and can never receive that wealth of gifts which Jesus in coming desires to confer upon them. Incom-

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parable treasures were destined for them, which they will never receive for want of this necessary preparation.

Jesus desires souls like unto His own. The divine host has need of human hosts that He may communicate Himself to them without reserve.

Finally, Jesus is all holiness, all purity. Here again you ought, by a great purity of conscience, to force yourselves to become like Him, in order to be ready for the hour of His visit.

However attentive, however generous you may be, it will always happen, alas ! that you will stumble into certain faults, at all events faults of frailty.

What ought you to do, then ? Make amends immediately, not let the stain of sin remain for a moment upon your soul, lest it should sink in ; but at once efface it by an act of love.

Suppose the atmosphere were free and conscious ; suppose it wished to prepare itself for that beneficent communion which the sun offers it each morning at dawn ; what would it do ? If it could it would dissipate the mists and sweep away the clouds, in order to proffer itself all transparent to the rays of the great luminary so soon to penetrate it.

So it is that you should prepare your souls for the visit of Him who is their light and warmth, Jesus the divine sun of justice and holiness ; you should rid yourselves of all that might dim your souls ; you should sweep away, by the breath of charity and contrition, all the dark vapours of sin, in order to present your souls without stain, quite pure, to Him who only asks that He may imbue them with His virtue.

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To sum up. Distant preparation consists in living habitually in a state of recollection, in detachment of heart, in mortification and renunciation, and lastly in purity of conscience, which condition must be carefully maintained by making amends for your faults as soon as they are committed.

This is the work which is asked of you if you would eat your divine bread with much profit.

Do not be discouraged when you consider the magnitude of the task! We do not say that you will obtain nothing from your communions if you do not undertake this work. But we do say that this preliminary preparation is the condition and the measure of any serious gain, and that in undertaking it as you are able, you will increase a hundredfold the fruit of your communions.

Is not this enough to awaken your ardour and all your good-will? Labour is only really hard when it is unrewarded; and in this case the reward is magnificent.

The certainty of supernatural rewards which await you and which surpass all that tongue could utter will support you in your daily efforts, will stimulate your zeal, and will give you a strength and constancy to yourself unknown, and by which you yourselves will be amazed. Moreover, Jesus will be there to increase your energies and your courage a hundredfold. This cross, of the daily work of preparation, Jesus Himself will bear upon His shoulders, and He will ask you, as He asked the Cyrenæan, only to give Him a little help.

You will walk beside Jesus, to climb, in His

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footsteps, your daily Calvary. Your heart will be filled with warmth by the contact with His, and each communion will be for you a rest and a comfort. Every time Jesus enters your heart you will be with Him upon Tabor, you will forget your sorrow and your weariness; or rather you will remember them only to bless them, on account of the joys and the graces you will thereby have merited. And this Tabor of communion, which is already so blessed and so strengthening, where your spirit, your heart, and your soul will be bathed in purest radiance and clothe themselves in the splendours of grace—this earthly Tabor will prove but the commencement of a more dazzling splendour, the dawn of a more overpowering light, the foretaste of happiness a thousand times greater and more complete, a happiness without alloy and without decline, the prelude, in short, of the Tabor of glory, the Tabor of heaven !

CHAPTER IX

APPROACHING AND IMMEDIATE PREPARATION FOR HOLY COMMUNION

“Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who taketh away the sin of the world.”—*St. John* i. 29.

WE have distinguished three kinds of preparation for Holy Communion: distant, approaching, and immediate preparation. We have explained in what distant preparation consists and for what ordinary dispositions it calls.

We now come to approaching and immediate preparation. These will be the subjects of this chapter.

Approaching preparation consists in the acts which should be made at the approach of communion; that is, during the evening previous and the morning before reaching church.

Experience proves that the thoughts and feelings to which we surrender ourselves just before going to sleep engrave themselves deeply upon the soul. During sleep a sort of unconscious work goes forward, by which one is penetrated by the last impressions of the evening. In virtue of this principle the schoolboy is advised to read his “preparation” just before getting into bed; and the pious person will do the same with her meditation. In the morning we find ourselves naturally full of the thoughts

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of the night before; they have in a way ripened in the mind during the night; they have slumbered and awake refreshed.

So before going to rest ponder a few minutes on your communion of the morrow. Read, for example, two or three verses of the fourth book of the "Imitation," or a few lines of any other work treating of the Eucharist. Or do you yourselves, if you prefer it, make a few acts of love and desire relative to Holy Communion, and go to sleep upon these pious considerations.

As soon as you awake in the morning, let your first thoughts and the first movements of your heart be for Jesus, who is coming. Speed already to meet Him by an ardent desire and a holy impatience to communicate, remembering that you can have no greater happiness nor receive a fuller grace.

The divine Master told His disciples that the children of light should, in their way, imitate the children of darkness.

The children of darkness are those who seek after the pleasures of this world. Observe the eagerness, the impetuous ardour of their desires! Women possessed with the desire to shine and to please—do they not fall asleep imbued with the idea of their vanity? Do they not lull their imagination with golden or rather nonsensical dreams? Their first waking thought is to ask themselves what dress they shall wear that evening, with what jewels they shall adorn their ears, what flowers will look best in their hair? And they see themselves, in advance, in the midst of the lighted rooms, surrounded with incense and homage. They wish they were there already.

What a lesson for you! Children of light

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and love, imitate the daughters of darkness and vanity; better still, surpass them by the depth and the strength of your holy desires.

May these desires be as ardent as those of the thirsting hart that panteth after the source !

May they be as urgent as those of the royal prophet, who cried, in his spiritual thirst: "Oh, that some one could bring me to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem !" It was no terrestrial water for which he thirsted; when the water he so desired was brought he would not even touch it. He thirsted after the waters of heaven; after God and the grace of God.

Let your desires be as impatient as those of the little child for the breast of its mother: the little child that struggles, fights and cries until it has obtained its desire.

Finally, in order that your desires may achieve greater force and intensity, let them find expression in a few words or a few short prayers, pronounced mentally if not aloud.

Then, before leaving your home and until the moment of communion, make very sure that your mind is not given over to foreign preoccupations. Every duty that need not absolutely be performed before communion you should defer until afterwards. If it is some household detail which absolutely must be seen to, do so without scruple, but without becoming absorbed in it, carefully keeping a perfect freedom of mind and heart, that they may be ready for the great act which you are about to accomplish.

"The eyes which desire to see Jesus Christ," says St. Jerome, "do not deign to observe other things." This is not the moment to make

plans and arrangements for the day. Apply yourself only to what is strictly necessary, or you may be preparing distractions that will soon assail you and for which you will in this way be responsible.

Take thought also to the clothing of your body as well as to that of your soul. No negligence in your dress; but no striving for effect, no unnecessary adornment. Let all be simple, modest, in good taste: I would even say to the taste of Him who is coming to meet you and unite Himself to you.

Finally, be more than usually careful in your prayers and your meditation; unless, that is, you prefer to pray and meditate in church, finding there greater peace and tranquillity.

Now you are ready, body and soul; and you set forth. On the way to church, no matter how short it may be, retain that spirit of modesty and recollection, and above all those ardent desires which so please your divine Saviour, in that they are among the most certain marks of your love for Him.

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When the church is reached the immediate preparation commences.

The best preparation is obviously the hearing of mass. Do not readily dispense therewith. Remember that in the spirit of the Church and in the thought of the divine Master communion is a participation in the holy sacrifice which is accomplished upon the altar; it is the consumption of the victim. Certainly it is permitted to communicate without hearing mass; and you must have no scruple when there are legitimate reasons for your so doing. You may find it a moral impossibility to attend mass:

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in the country, for example, where it is sometimes celebrated at too early or too late an hour.

But as often as you can, even if you find it inconvenient, communicate at mass, after hearing mass, for this is greatly to be preferred and is in accordance with the desires of the Church, to which you should always endeavour to conform.

As to the manner of hearing mass, you are free. There are various methods, and the best will be that which is best adapted to your dispositions and your supernatural inclinations.

Sometimes you will unite yourself closely to the priest, reciting the same prayers at the same time.

Sometimes you will continue your meditation, especially if the subject refers to the Eucharist or to the sufferings of our Saviour.

Sometimes you will read, or rehearse in your mind, and above all in your heart, some scenes of the Passion of the Saviour, while reflecting that they are being renewed before you.

Sometimes you will ponder successively upon the four objects of the sacrifice of the altar—adoration, thanksgiving, atonement, petition. Or one day you will confine yourself to one method, on the following day to another. These are the four fundamental points of religion, and therefore the essential dispositions of a Christian should be to bring them home to himself. Always take heed—and this is essential—that whatever may be the nature of your spiritual exercises, you unite yourself intimately with our Lord, who sacrifices Himself for you.

You may do this in two ways. Either address yourself to Jesus to adore Him, implore His forgiveness, thank Him, and beg for His graces, and then, feeling profoundly your impotence

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and your unworthiness, present to Him, in the place of your own too-imperfect thoughts and feelings, those of your guardian angel, of the saints, and better still, of the most Blessed Virgin; you can also address yourself to God the Father, offering to Him the acts and feelings which Jesus presents to Him upon the altar.

You may finally think of the multitude of those who have not faith, or have lost grace and render neither to God nor to Jesus Christ such homage as they should. You will substitute yourself for them, adoring, giving thanks, imploring mercy, and demanding all the graces in their place and for them.

In such thoughts and methods you will find a great stimulant to your piety and your heart. You may choose those which please you most, bringing to this choice a great spiritual liberty, and following the inspirations of "the Spirit that breatheth where He will."

The important point is each time to determine in advance the method which you intend to follow, so as to avoid hesitation at the last moment, and to adhere to your decision, making an exception only for those impulses of grace which should always be followed if they clearly take possession of you.

You will also find, in all books, acts to be read before communion; their use is not obligatory, but they may provide you with the best thoughts and place you in excellent dispositions to profit by the sacrament you are about to receive, on condition that you read them slowly and are really penetrated by the sentiments which they express. It is far better to read one attentively than to run quickly through two or three,

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which will slip from your mind and leave no trace.

Finally, whatever you can draw from your own heart, however imperfect, will as a rule be preferable to what is borrowed from others.

To aid you in this work of immediate preparation—the more fruitful for you and the more agreeable to our Lord as it is the more personal—let us reduce all the acts which can be made before communion to three principal ones: namely, acts of faith, of humility, and desire. They correspond to the three sentiments with which the Church wishes to inspire you by the words which she has placed in the mouth of the priest before the communion of the faithful. Now in these matters we have no better guide than the Church, led in all that she demands of us by the Holy Ghost.

“*Ecce agnus Dei*,” says the priest, in turning towards the people and elevating the divine host above the ciborium. “Behold the Lamb of God!” It is the name by which Jesus was first called by John the Baptist on the banks of the Jordan. Showing Him to His disciples, John said to them: “Behold the Lamb of God!”

This is the word of faith; the word that calls upon and stimulates your faith. And how well this name of “lamb” befits Jesus during the mass! John the Baptist added: “Behold Him who taketh away the sin of the world!” At the hour of mass and communion you must believe that Jesus is there as the Lamb of God; that is, as the victim offered for our sins.

You too often forget this essential point of doctrine, which we have already repeated. You

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see in the host Jesus the Child, as He was when He lay in the manger; and Jesus, glorious and re-arisen, as He is in heaven. Certainly you are right. Jesus renews and continues both these states in the Eucharist. But at the hour of mass and communion—it cannot too often be repeated—the state in which Jesus more especially presents Himself to you, although it does not exclude the others, is that of the victim sacrificed and offered for our sins. This is why the priest, repeating the words of the Precursor, says, “Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who taketh away the sin of the world !”

If you understood these first words—if you grasped their extent and their import—if you were convinced and penetrated by this one thought: “The host that I am about to receive is the Lamb of God, it is God made man, it is Jesus a victim because of sin—truly and actually victim for my sins and for the sins of the world ”—that would be enough ! This sole feeling of profound faith, penetrating the most intimate places of your soul, would suffice to transform it, inflame it, and prepare it worthily for communion.

Then, in truth, your faith, ardent and sincere, rending the veils of the sacrament, would display Jesus before your eyes as He was on the cross, all covered with wounds and blood—Jesus imploring mercy for his murderers: “My Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do !”—Jesus substituting Himself for you and all sinners, and making Himself the victim of atonement in your place—Jesus, who in His heart overflowing with mercy and love, is happy to die and to suffer for you—Jesus, who did not suffer enough upon the cross, who is

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not content to die once for all men, but wishes to suffer and to die for you again—Jesus, who is not content with having once been a victim for all, but wishes to become a victim every day, and thousands of times over; a victim especially for you, at this moment and every day, if you so wish.

Should not such holy thoughts suffice to dispose you for communion; to fill you with sorrow, contrition, gratitude, love, and enthusiasm for Him who is there and is about to descend into your heart? “Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who taketh away the sin of the world!”

These words thoroughly understood, this act of faith well made, would suffice to render your preparation excellent.

Now, all proceeds from this first disposition and this fundamental act. First of all humility: “Domine, non sum dignus,” adds the priest immediately. “Lord, I am not worthy.”

Must not the sentiment of faith produce a profound humility? What! the Lamb of God comes to me, is a victim for my sake, wishes to give Himself to me, poor and wretched sinner that I am! What am I, then?

Born yesterday, a creature of dust and nothingness, I have disowned You, my God, my Creator, and my Father; I have a thousand times offended You; a thousand times I have turned from You. You come to me! I have deserved all manner of punishment, and You bring me all imaginable rewards!

John the Baptist declared that he was unworthy to unloose the latchet of Your shoes; and You wish me to receive You in my heart!

How far more than Peter have I reason to say to You: “Depart from me, Lord, a sinful

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man !” Oh ! at least I confess my wretchedness and nothingness ; I abase myself utterly ; I feel for myself nothing but contempt and disgust ; I efface myself before You, and am amazed to think that You are about to come to me ! “ Domine, non sum dignus !”

Who can express how pleasing to Jesus is humility ? “ Domine, non sum dignus.” It is the saying of the centurion, which obtained for him the cure of His son ; the word so greatly praised by Jesus when he praised the faith of this man, for this act of humility was assuredly the outcome of his faith. The same feeling will once more touch the heart of Jesus, and will cause Him to accomplish miracles of healing within your soul.

This is indeed what the priest says in his third sentence, this is what he repeats for each of the faithful as he places the sacred host upon your lips : “ May the body of our Lord Jesus Christ keep thy soul to life everlasting !”

It is a wish to which the priest gives utterance, a desire which he expresses and which should be our most ardent desire also : the desire that Jesus should keep us ; that His body should keep us, since it is His body that we have received, His body that has suffered for us ; that He should keep our soul, preserving it from sin, turning it away from evil, sustaining it in temptation ; that He should keep it pure and spotless ; that he should keep in our soul the true life, His own life, the life of His Father, the divine life ; that He should keep it in our soul so that henceforth no one can deprive us of it ; that He should keep it there for ever : “ May the body of our Lord Jesus Christ keep thy soul to life everlasting !”

This is the desire that should fill our hearts ;

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this is the third and last act before communion. Like the preceding act, it proceeds from the first; it takes its source from faith.

Since You are victim for me, O Jesus; since You love me enough to come to me, despite my unworthiness and my sins; since You come to me to heal me, redeem me, sanctify me, to unite me to Yourself, to transform me into Yourself, to dwell within me,—I have only one desire left; but this desire burns and consumes me, it absorbs all that there is in me, and I cannot rest until it is realised: work, then, within me that for which You come, for You know better than I what is for my good and what You should accomplish within me.

My whole desire, my sole and unique desire, is Yours; it is that Your desire should be realised; that You should possess me; that I should become Your property; that my intelligence, my heart, my will, should no longer have a life of their own, but should pass into absolute dependence upon You and should have no other master than You, no other life than Yours: it is that my soul, in short, should no longer be mine, but Yours; that You should take it, make it wholly Yours, and keep it for ever. "*Custodiat animam tuam in vitam æternum.*"

And this desire, O my God, is not only most ardent, but is also and above all things confident. It was born of faith, and faith sustains it, strengthens it, and reassures it. I believe, I know that You will accomplish in me that which You promise me.

When the centurion had heard Your promise he at once turned, calm and confident, and asked nothing more; and on reaching his house he

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found that his son had been healed at the very moment when Jesus spoke.

All that You declare to me, Jesus, all that You promise me I believe, as if it were all already realised. I am nothing, but You are all; I can do nothing, but all is in Your power. I believe that You can overcome my malice, triumph over my resistance, cure all my infirmities, heal all my wounds, awaken in me all the virtues, and give me courage and perseverance to overcome evil and accomplish good.

Yes, this I believe with an unshaken confidence, and I rest in peace upon Your heart, in the consciousness of Your omnipotence and Your infinite goodness.

Faith, humility, holy desires, desires full of confidence: such are the principal dispositions of the soul before Holy Communion. The priest reminds us of these in the name of the Church, and we cannot do better than absorb ourselves in them, either by making special acts or by mingling them with all the other acts which it is fitting that we should make, or by any other method that we prefer to follow.

But let Jesus dominate all, efface all, bring forgetfulness of all things other than Himself or what refers to Him! May He appear to you alone, in all the splendour of His divinity, in all the radiance of His love and goodness, as He appeared to the apostles on Tabor, so that suddenly, even happier than they, not only beholding Him, but possessing Him and uniting yourself to Him in that incomprehensible mystery of love, you will be able to say, with far greater reason than the disciples: "Lord, it is good that we are here!"

CHAPTER X

THANKSGIVING AFTER HOLY COMMUNION

“And taking bread, He gave thanks.”—*St. Luke* xxii. 19.

THANKSGIVING!

Need we touch upon such a subject? For if there is a moment when the heart should speak of itself, and speak from its very fulness, is it not this? Jesus, the Son of God made man, has descended into your heart. “We cannot reflect upon this form of the gift of God,” cries Mgr. Gay, “without understanding and feeling that it is amazing!” Jesus is there, with all His divinity, all His humanity, all His grace, all His love; He is there, in short, His whole self, with all His gifts! He is there, within this host, and therefore in you and for you alone. He is yours, your own property, your own possession. He has made Himself wholly subject to you.

“There is not in the whole of our lives,” says St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, “a moment more precious than this, nor one more favourable for conversing with God and inflaming ourselves with His love. Do not let us trouble, then, about books or masters, since we have Jesus Christ, who teaches us Himself the true way to love Him.”

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What a moment it is ! And how useless it should be to say anything of the manner of employing it !

Yet experience shows that it is necessary to instruct the faithful on this subject ! So many who communicate frequently remain, alas ! so cold, so arid, so absent, not quite knowing what to do during the time of thanksgiving, and sometimes—we dare hardly say it—finding the time overlong.

Such people do themselves an incalculable wrong ; they lose the greater part of the fruits of their communion. “As the welcome I receive,” said our Lord to St. Margaret of Cortona, “so is the welcome I bestow.” All spiritual writers attest that there is no moment in life when grace is more abundant and more powerful than at the moment of communion. They affirm with Father Faber, “that a single communion well made would suffice to render one worthy of being canonised, and thanksgiving is the moment in which the soul identifies itself with Him whom it possesses within itself, and in which it drinks more copiously than ever of the springs of light and life.”

How important, then, it is to warn the faithful of their obligations after communion, and to instruct them, practically and in detail, as to the manner in which they should employ the time of thanksgiving.

But the subject is a difficult one to deal with, on account of its extent, the abundance of material, and the impossibility of saying all. We shall be obliged to limit ourselves to giving a few counsels and practical indications, and to pointing out several methods, among which

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each can choose the most suitable to herself. Moreover, it is permissible to vary the method from day to day, to follow one to-day and another to-morrow, according to the nature of your private devotions. The essential thing is not to confine yourself to one method rather than another, but to employ your time of thanksgiving worthily, for it is precious above all.

In the first place, it is of course understood that while not advising you to depend upon books, at least as a general thing, their use is not prohibited. You will find there acts for use after communion which are generally well expressed, and to which you may resort if you think fit.

But always, in such cases, begin by producing within yourselves, at least for a few moments, an act of profound adoration for our Lord who is present within you. However poor you may be in imagination or in personal sentiments, you can always make this effort to represent to yourself the divine Saviour dwelling within you and desiring to unite Himself to you; to place yourself in spirit at his feet, and there to rest a moment, prostrate in your poverty, in order to proclaim Him your God and your all.

Here is a first act; elementary, very easy, which anyone can make, and which is, nevertheless, excellent.

Then open a book and read, if you like: but read as slowly as possible. Do not tell yourself: "I must read all the acts after communion marked in my book." No! The important thing is to absorb what you read, and therefore you must read thoughtfully and force yourself

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to feel inwardly the sentiments expressed by the words you are pronouncing.

If now you wish to make your thanksgiving by yourself—and you all should at least try to do so, even with a certain perseverance, a determination not to be too quickly discouraged—here is some advice that will help you greatly.

Commence by reflecting that your act is to be one of thanksgiving. It is this, evidently, that you should think of most; and, as a matter of fact, it is this that is most often forgotten. An incredible thing, were it not continually verified, that what is least thought of during the thanksgiving is the giving of thanks! Yet is not this the essential object to be attained?

Eucharist signifies “thanksgiving.” Jesus instituted this adorable sacrament principally to give thanks to His Father. The first time He took bread to change it into His body, the Gospel tells us that “He gave thanks.” Immediately after communicating, adds the Gospel, the apostles recited “the hymn of thanksgiving.”

The Church, finally, desires the priest at the altar, at the moment of consecration, to repeat the words in which Jesus rendered thanks: “Item tibi gratias agens.”

Thanksgiving is thus the chief end of communion. Now, this end is forgotten by many of the faithful; and by an inexcusable confusion of ideas, by an inconceivable inadvertence, they make their thanksgiving without giving thanks—indeed, we might say that they do other things.

What, then, do they do? They still ask. Eager and insatiable, they forget what they have received; and before even giving the mere

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thanks that courtesy would demand, they importune the Lord with endless petitions.

Is there not in this a great deal of selfishness, an absolute lack of gratitude, and the principal reason why communion often bears so little fruit?

Let this be well understood. It is neither forbidden to ask after communion nor is the communicant advised not to do so. It is the very time even when you may ask most. Profit by this moment to open your heart to our Lord, explain to Him your individual needs, with all the confidence that a child should feel for its father. "After communion," writes St. Teresa, "Jesus Christ resides in our soul as on a throne of grace, and He says to us what He said of old to the man born blind: 'What wilt thou that I do to thee?' Yes, well-beloved soul, tell me what thou desirest, for I am come to visit thee only to fulfil thy desires to the uttermost."

This is doubtless true. But first of all we must elevate our petitions; and without excluding temporal things we ought a hundred times more to lean towards spiritual things. We must also broaden our petitions—we must not limit ourselves to asking on behalf of ourselves and those dear to us, but must extend our prayers to all mankind, to the entire world. We shall lose nothing by so doing, moreover; as the more we ask for others the more shall we obtain for ourselves.

But in asking we must not forget to give thanks. You have received from God the greatest of all gifts, the gift that contains all others. Must you not at least say: "I thank Thee"?

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Do you not feel that as much as your petition risks of selfishness, just so much your gratitude is one of the necessary forms of self-forgetfulness and of real love? You have been receiving; think of giving in return; and the first gift should be your thanks, your true and sincere gratitude; even if you struggle but a few moments against your selfishness, forgetting yourself to think of our Lord and to thank Him, you will already have done much.

And it is then also that you will obtain even more. The best means of receiving more of God is to thank Him for the favours received; for then God will see that you deserve to receive again. Ingratitude closes His heart; gratitude opens it more widely than ever.

In your communions, then, above all think of what you are doing, and really do it; namely, give thanks, since you are making an act of thanksgiving.

But what is giving thanks, and how are you going to give thanks? The whole secret of a good thanksgiving and the fruits of communion are there. Thanksgiving is of such import that it contains all the principal acts of religion.

From the standpoint of God, indeed, all religion resides in grace; for grace is the gift of God. Therefore on our side religion consists in our corresponding to grace; this should be our gift to God, our thanksgiving. Let us consider the matter in detail.

To give thanks is to do three things: to understand, to respond, and to give. To understand the value of the graces given, and to estimate them at their true worth. To determine to

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correspond to these graces. Finally, to do something for your benefactor.

Develop these three thoughts, and you will find in them all the material for a fervent and fruitful thanksgiving.

To understand the price of graces received, we must recall them in detail and appreciate them. So you might very usefully, during your thanksgiving, go over in your mind and heart all that our Lord brings you in communion. We have already told what He brings you in enumerating the effects of communion.

You will remember them all: sanctifying grace, actual grace, graces of healing for spiritual infirmities and wants, graces of furtherance in health and life, and above all graces of love, graces of intimate union with Jesus and of transformation in Him, graces for your neighbour, graces for the Church, and graces for the glory of God and His reign on earth.

You will count over all these graces; you will try to form a really true idea of them; you will, so to speak, weigh them. Then you will gradually feel your soul fill with joy, with gratitude, and you will feel an imperious need to give thanks to Jesus and to God from the bottom of your heart, thanks full of adoration and love.

Afterwards, quite naturally, if your thanks are sincere, you will wish to respond to these graces, and you will consider, with sorrow and regret, your resistance and all the obstacles to grace which you see within you. These we have spoken of; you will recall them to your memory. They are sin, the habit of sin, and above all, affection for sin.

Then you will experience and further excite

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in your soul a deep and increasing sorrow, an intense contrition for everything in you that has displeased or is still displeasing to our Lord. In the light of His presence you will look your faults in the face, your ordinary faults which are the obstacle to grace, and you will detest them !

“ O Jesus ! ” you will say, “ the obstacle, for me, is pride ; it is pride that prevents You from reigning fully in my heart. I detest this pride, and I wish to correct it ; help me ! O Jesus ! the obstacle, for me, is indolence, laziness ; it is this that prevents me from being wholly Yours. I condemn this fault, I wish to overcome it, help me ! ”

And thus each of you, under the eyes and at the feet of Jesus—or rather on His heart and in the closest union with Him—each will strive against the obstacle, against the sins that check the effusions of grace and delay their triumph.

Can you better express to Jesus your thanks than by saying to him : “ O Jesus, I wish to prove my gratitude to You by my fidelity. I wish to give You love for love, by causing Your gifts to bear fruit in such a way that not one shall be wasted ” ?

In the third place, if you really feel the value of all the graces you are receiving, if you weigh their magnitude and their greatness, you will want to do something yourself, in your turn, for your great benefactor. It is already doing something for Him if you have determined to correspond to His gifts. But this will not be enough ; you will wish to do more. Well, what ?

You will wish to do something for your

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benefactor immediately; something for Jesus, something for God.

For Jesus you can do that which He most desires; you can give yourself to Him in total surrender, making Him absolute master in your heart, letting Him act there according to the full extent of His designs, and awaiting from His divine bounty the transformation which He comes to perform within you.

You will say, for example:

“ O soul of Jesus, full of grace and divinity, lift up my soul, sanctify it, pour upon it all the treasures that You bear within Your own; I implore You by Your merits and Your goodness, for the glory of Your Father and the Most Holy Trinity !

“ O mind of Jesus, full of light and truth, enlighten me, instruct me, increase my faith and dissipate the darkness which conceals from me the ugliness and the malice of sin ! May my mind become in all like Yours; I implore You by Your merits and Your goodness, for the glory of Your Father and the Most Holy Trinity !

“ O imagination of Jesus, full of purity and innocence, purify my imagination, cleanse it of all that may soil or tarnish it, and fill it with the fair and saintly images which constantly occupy Your own; I implore You by Your merits and Your goodness, for the glory of Your Father and the Most Holy Trinity !

“ O will of Jesus, full of uprightness, strength, and perseverance, confirm and strengthen my will, and maintain it always in the right path; I implore You by Your merits and Your goodness,

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for the glory of Your Father and the Most Holy Trinity !

“ O heart of Jesus, full of love and charity, full of sweetness and humility, full of zeal and devotion, fill my heart with all the ardours and the virtues of Your own; I implore You by Your merits and Your goodness, for the glory of Your Father and the Most Holy Trinity !

“ O body of Jesus, which never recoiled from any fatigue nor any suffering, and was torn and sacrificed for my salvation, render my body courageous to act, generous to suffer, patient to endure, and make of all my members, as of Yours, instruments of divine justice; I implore You by Your merits and Your goodness, for the glory of Your Father and the Most Holy Trinity !

“ O blood of Jesus, which flowed upon the cross to wash away the sins of the world, enrapture me, purify my blood and cause to flow therein all the generous ardours that flowed within Your own; I implore You by Your merits and Your goodness, for the glory of Your Father and the Most Holy Trinity !

“ O Jesus, let Your flesh and Your blood so mingle with my flesh and blood as to transform them and make them wholly Yours !

“ Let my intelligence and imagination, my will and my heart, and all my faculties disappear and be lost in Yours ! Let my soul be so united to Yours that it no longer exists, but that Yours alone lives in mine !

“ Finally, let all things in me be so wholly Yours, O Jesus, that You shall remain their only master, so that You shall dispose of all that I have and all that I am, according to Your

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sole good pleasure, for Your greater glory and that of Your Father and the Most Holy Trinity !”

How can you fail to please Jesus by speaking to Him thus, and how fail to show Him the depth and sincerity of your gratitude, since you turn to His advantage and profit all that He has given you, and express no desire but that of realising His? You can do nothing better for Him in this moment of union and thanksgiving.

And what will you do for His Father, for God? If there is a time and a manner in which you can do much for God, it is at this moment and by means of your communion.

And in truth, being possessed of Jesus, being so closely united to Him, you have “entered,” as the Scriptures say, “into the powers of the Lord,” and you can render God infinite homage, on the sole condition that it is rendered by Jesus in you. This, therefore, is what you will do:

You will present Jesus to His Father and to the Trinity; or better still—according to the counsel and the custom of the holy Curé d’Ars—you will pray Mary to take Jesus living in you and to present Him herself to God, and you will say:

“O my God, behold Your Christ in the arms of His Mother: here He is; to You I offer Him!

“I offer You all the adoration, all the thanksgiving, all the forgiveness of His mortal life, and all those which He offers You without ceasing in heaven, in the holy Eucharist, and which He renews at this moment in my heart.”

And so saying let these thoughts penetrate you through and through, and set yourself to adore,

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to give thanks, and to implore forgiveness, not only for yourself, but for the whole universe, in union with Jesus, who does likewise in you and by you.

Continue, saying:

“ O my God, behold Your Christ and grant His prayers, since He Himself has declared that You will answer them always !

“ Behold His body, which has suffered poverty, labour, fatigue, fasting, hunger and thirst; His body, all bruised upon the cross ! Behold His hands and His feet pierced by nails, His brow scarred by thorns, His heart pierced by the lance, His deep wounds, His torn flesh, and His blood that flows from all His severed veins !

“ Behold His soul; its virtues, its prayers, its sufferings, its mortal sadness, its distress and abandonment !

“ O my God, behold Your Christ and grant His prayers !

“ Grant the prayers of Your Christ for the heathen and the infidel; and enlighten them. The prayers of Your Christ for heretics, schismatics, and apostates; bring them again to Yourself. The prayers of Your Christ for sinners; convert them. The prayers of Your Christ for persecutors; forgive them. The prayers of Your Christ for the Church, the Sovereign Pontiff, for bishops, for the souls of apostles; sanctify them more and more, fill them with strength and zeal ! O my God, You can refuse nothing to Your Son; may all these graces be accorded to His prayer ! It is He, it is Your Christ, who asks this in me !”

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Do you not believe that a thanksgiving thus made must be most excellent, that it must give God sovereign glory and win incalculable blessings for you and for the world ?

Do you not believe that such feelings in your heart will give you an exemplary outward bearing, as you sit or kneel, according to your health and your strength ; a bearing full of profound devotion which should be edifying to others ?

Do you think a good half-hour would be too long for such a thanksgiving : do you not rather think it too short ? Will you not do all that depends upon you, and will you not foresee and arrange all your occupations, so that you can spare this half-hour ? If you could spare only a quarter of an hour, would you not feel distressed ? Would you not try to supplement it during the day by still further giving a few minutes ?

If your hearts were filled with such dispositions, would any room be left for distractions ? If an intruding thought or feeling found its way there, would it not be immediately repulsed, or forgotten in the flood of your gratitude ? And if the thought of your legitimate duties were to present itself to you at such a time, would it not merely add a fresh impulse to the ardour of your piety and love ?

Finally, if you should find yourselves in a condition of spiritual insensibility and dryness, would this prevent you from making a good thanksgiving ? Certainly not ! Would you endeavour to seek spiritual consolations and satisfactions for your own sake ? No ! Since you should forget yourselves for God, you should think of God and not of yourselves, seeking His

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good pleasure and not your own, asking not for the sweetness and the joys of communion, but for the strength of duty and the courage of sacrifice.

And how much better you will be on your return home! Certain communions, in which you have sought your own profit, are followed by terrible reactions of nature when you are once more confronted with the tiresome duties and all the irritating incidents of domestic life. But, on the contrary, the communions during which you have armed yourself for sacrifice protect you from these petty shocks on your return, which destroy without difficulty the false and superficial piety of a selfish communion.

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We have been suggesting ideas, sentiments and prayers which may be of help and service to you in making a good thanksgiving.

But let me repeat here what I have already said of the preparation; the best thanksgivings are your own. This is why spiritual writers recommend us not to make use of books during thanksgiving; at all events, not during the first few minutes; unless, indeed, the heart is too barren and the mind too distracted.

Yes, the best thanksgiving you can make is that which you will draw from your own heart, from the very depths of your heart, that into which you put the most love; for do not let us forget that love is all, and thanksgiving is only a form and a manifestation of love; it has no value in the eyes of God save by reason of the quantity and quality of its love.

On the other hand, love is free; it is not confined to any one form nor subject to any one

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language. It expresses itself as it will; it acts as seems good to it. This is the profound saying of the genius of St. Augustine: "Love, and do all that you will." When one loves sincerely all is well, all is good in the eyes of God; because God looks only at the heart.

Provided you love during your thanksgiving, express your love as you please; all will be pleasing to God.

You feel this keenly, you mothers, when you express your affection to your children, those little creatures born of you. Now you press them in your arms; you press them upon your heart as though you would stifle them; you devour them with kisses.

Now you speak to them. Now you gaze at them in silence. Do you love them more or less at these different moments? No! your love is always the same. Whether it finds expression in a word, a look, a kiss, or in silence, it is always equally deep and tender.

Thus it is with your love for God, for Jesus. After communion it matters little what you say and how you say it; or what you leave unsaid. "Love, and do all that you will!"

The essential thing is to love! The essential thing is the quality of the love! If it is selfish and egotistical, if you seek only for consolation and sweetness, if you seek only yourself, it is a false love which will not please God. Your thanksgiving will be a failure.

But if you think of God, of His favours, of the best way to thank Him for them, to prove your gratitude to Him; if you seek to please Jesus, understanding His graces, longing to respond to them, and only asking that you may be changed

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in Him, that you may glorify Him in order to glorify His Father; oh, then you will love greatly, for you will love God and Jesus for themselves, with the love of gratitude and charity. Your thanksgiving will be holy and efficacious, because of the pure and exalted love that it contains.

Therefore, in communion render Jesus love for love! May the divine fire of His love for you fill you in turn with love for Him! Respond to this love of His by an ardent desire to be entirely His and for ever, and surrender yourself to those spontaneous effusions, those transports, those overflowings of the heart by which you will express your love better than by any words and any method!

In this happy and incomparable moment of communion all is, as St. Francis of Sales said, "to love, in love, for love, by love, and of love."

Communion is truly an hour of heaven passed on earth, as heaven is a communion that never ends.

Dwell therefore always, if it is possible, if not in the actual at least in the virtual dispositions of your communion, by a persevering love, forever renewed, for Jesus within you. Thus all your life will become an anticipated heaven, as heaven itself will be a continual thanksgiving, nourished by a love without decline, without vicissitudes, and without end!

CHAPTER XI

THE DAY OF COMMUNION

“For to me to live is Christ.”—*Phil. i. 21.*

YOU have communicated; your thanksgiving is accomplished; you return home. What conduct does the communion of the morning impose upon you?

Simply that you shall live as good Christians; I would say not as half-hearted Christians, but sincere Christians, logical with themselves, and wholly Christian.

What, then, is a Christian?

Not merely a person who follows the rules of her conscience and of natural morality, one who is frank and truthful, just and loyal, compassionate to the ills of others, and taking heed not to do to her neighbour that which she would not have her neighbour do to her; a wife keeping in conjugal fidelity the promise given to her husband; a mother devoted to her children; a housewife carefully busied with her house; a woman cultivating the natural gifts that God has given her and usefully employing her life.

All this is part of natural morality. A Christian must do these things still better than another, and must apply herself to them more carefully than ever on the day of communion.

But the Christian life calls for very much more. It requires, to begin with, a certain perfection

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of the natural virtues, to which it adds a delicacy and a finish that could only come from God. The Christian life also adds to the natural virtues thus perfected other new and eminent virtues; in particular, faith and charity. It throws a light upon the teachings of the Gospel and the examples of Christ. It fans the flames which consumed the divine heart.

A Christian must strive to put into practice the commandments and the counsels of the new law, which is chiefly a law of love. And finally, a Christian should endeavour to imitate and reproduce her Master and divine model, our Lord Jesus Christ, to unite herself with Him, to let Him live in her heart, in order that she may say with the apostle: "For me to live is Christ."

Such is the object to which the Christian life should tend, and therefore communion; for communion has no other object than to lead us to the perfection of the Christian life, and the perfection of the Christian life is to make Christ live within us.

Do not say that this is exaggeration or mysticism; you will be setting up your opinion against the teaching of St. Paul, and against the most authentic teaching of all the Fathers of the Church. Does not reason itself tell us that if we live by the bread we eat, then in receiving Christ as a divine nourishment we should live by Him and cause Him to live in us?

Now the life of Christ may be considered under two aspects: the one hidden, the other visible; the one without, the other within; the one in the intimacy of His soul, the other on His countenance; in His bearing, in His speech,

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in all His actions. And your own life must reproduce these same two aspects: "Clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus," says the apostle.

Within Christ the divine life, by hypostatic union, flows in dense waves, and pours itself forth in an immeasurable abundance.

God has put something of Himself in all creation: in the immensity of the seas, in the grandeur of the mountains, in the depths of the starry skies.

God has put more of Himself in the more perfect creatures, especially in man, whom He created in His own image and likeness, and whom He raised to the supernatural state.

But God is most of all in Christ, and in a measure that surpasses all that we are able to imagine; so that He could not be in Him more fully. God is one with Christ; we can no longer distinguish between God and Christ; what Christ does is done by God; and Mary, being the mother of Christ, is called the Mother of God.

On the other hand, this human nature of Christ—which remains human nature, with its own intelligence, its own will, its own sentiments—this nature, which in consequence remains free and fully master of itself, gives itself in turn without constraint, and abandons itself to God of its own free will, with all the energy of which it is capable.

Jesus as man looks to God without ceasing; He contemplates Him always; He does not turn His eyes aside for a moment, nor His thoughts. He loves God with inconceivable strength; He has transports of love that no words can ever

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express. He submits to the Divine Will in all things; He makes Himself subject to it with incredible perfection and infinite joy, and cries with enthusiasm: "Never do I anything of Myself: I do always that which is pleasing to My Father!"

Thus elevated, transfigured, deified, who shall even describe the moral life of Christ—its depth and sublimity; its perfection and the strength of all its virtues; its purity, its humility, its patience, and its charity?

Its love, above all, abounds in such a degree that it unceasingly seeks relief in overflowing. Jesus finds a real lightening of the burden that weighs Him down only in the sacrifice and the immolation of Himself, and He carries the desire of suffering to the extent of the folly of the cross. There only His heart finds joy; because there His love finds all the glory of His Father and all the good of our souls.

Victim for His Father, victim for His brothers, the victim of His sacred heart, of His infinite love: that is Jesus in His inner consciousness; Jesus within Himself!

But the life and love of Jesus cannot remain hidden within. The rays of His love must beam forth, they must blaze outwardly, a thousand times more resplendent than the sun as it breaks through the clouds.

The clouds represent the holy humanity of the Word; the sun is its divinity. The sun gilds the cloud; the divinity lights up the face of Christ with an unequalled splendour. All the sacred authors agree in speaking of the incomparable beauty of Jesus, and apply to Him the inspired

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words of the Scriptures: "He is the fairest of all the sons of men. It is by His beauty that He conquers and reigns over us." St. Teresa declares that having one day seen Him she could no longer look at anything in the world without loathing.

This beauty of Jesus we shall one day see; we shall gaze upon it above; it will form the ecstasy of the elect.

Jesus was not only beautiful; the dignity of His appearance was incomparable. It appeared in His face, His bearing, His movements, His voice, His gestures, and in all His attitudes. At Nazareth, in the desert, with His disciples, in the midst of crowds, at the well of Jacob with the Samaritan woman, at the house of Simon the Pharisee, when Magdalen was at His feet, when He pardoned the woman taken in adultery, preaching on the mountains or teaching in the temple, washing the feet of His apostles, betrayed before Caiphas, silent before Herod, replying to Pilate, everywhere He retained a dignity which never lied, and which overawed His most treacherous enemies.

To this dignity Jesus joined an air always calm and peaceful. In Him there was no precipitation, no agitation, no eagerness. If sometimes He showed emotion it was because He wished to do so, and because He found it useful for our instruction, in order to show us the reality of His human nature; but the peace of His soul remained always profound and unchangeable. "The silent courses of the planets," says Mgr. Gay, "and the tranquil peace of the beautiful nights of the tropics, give hardly an idea of the serenity of Jesus."

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Jesus was modest. St. Paul especially attributes this virtue to our Lord. He had in His nature something humble and reserved, something discreet and self-contained. He was modest because as a man He was conscious of the nothingness of His humanity and the infinite greatness of God. He was modest because he had taken upon Him the sins of the world and stood in the sinners' place. He was modest because He loved us and was careful not to alarm us, but to treat us with consideration. Thus He said to the apostles: "I am among you not as He who is served, but as He who serves."

But the supreme characteristic of Jesus, and the most apparent, was goodness, kindness, gentleness, affability—all that attracts and charms and does good. "It has appeared," says St. Paul, "the humanity and the loving-kindness of God our Saviour!"

Jesus was good to all; good to little children, whom He embraced and blessed; good to those who labour and are heavy laden, who suffer and bow beneath the burden. He calls them all to Him, promising them comfort and rest. He is good to sinners, to whom He reveals Himself as the Father of the Prodigal Son, and the Good Shepherd who gives his life for his sheep. His goodness was gentle, patient, inexhaustible, universal; it adapted itself to all, was delicate and perfect. And this adorable goodness was reflected and shone upon His countenance, giving His face an expression that won all hearts and touched the souls of all. Jesus was goodness itself.

This is the model that you must seek to imitate always, but more especially on the days of

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communion; since the aim of your communions is to make yourself as perfect an image as may be of Jesus Himself.

Within you possess, like Him, sanctifying grace; the life of God. It seizes you and holds you closely. It seeks to sweep away all your own individual life that you may live by it alone. And it rests with you whether this great work is accomplished. Therefore surrender all your faculties generously to God, who, living in you, only asks to take possession of them.

Give to God all your thoughts, all your reflections, all your desires !

Give to God all your feelings, all your impressions, all your affections !

Give to God all your resolutions, all your decisions, all your intentions !

Let all be inspired by God and find its beginning in Him !

Let all depend upon God and return to God, trusting all to Him !

Renounce your personal ideas and impressions as well as your own will. "Enter into the powers of the Lord," as the Scripture bids you, so that you act only through Him, and so that you can say with Christ: "Of myself I do nothing; my Father acts and I act;" or with St. Paul: "I live, but it is no longer I; but Christ lives within me. My life is Christ."

But your life, like that of Christ, should not remain hidden within you; it must be manifested outwardly. Faithful copies of Jesus within, you ought also to be living images of Him outwardly, like mirrors reflecting Him.

The beauty with which you will be clad in heaven depends on you; it will be what you

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have made it by your merits. Here on earth you cannot change your features nor the material form of your countenance. But you can give them a new expression by virtue of your inner dispositions.

Is not this just what happens in the world? Under the stimulus of vanity does not your expression grow smiling and gracious, so much so that your husband sometimes exclaims: "A pity my wife doesn't look like that at home!"

When you have received Holy Communion, let your husband, your children, and your servants find you more beautiful! Let there be a brighter light in your eyes, a softer warmth in your glance! Let there be a greater grace in your expression and more kindness on your lips!

May Jesus shine forth and show Himself in you by that indefinable something that makes your whole expression, which inspires both sympathy and respect, which charms and attracts!

In the days of the French Revolution it was said that a certain young orator was filled with divinity, so great was his ascendancy over the Assembly.

May the divinity which is in you, which lives in you, show in your face and your whole person some sign of the radiance and splendour of its eternal beauty! Be more beautiful, with the beauty of Christ, when you return from the holy table.

Be also more worthy! "Walk here below in a manner worthy of God," says St. Paul. Let this worth, this dignity, betray itself in your whole being! You are more than kings' daughters; you are the temples of God, the members of Jesus, the sanctuaries of the Holy

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Spirit. Out of respect for Him who dwells in you, avoid all irreverence, all vulgarity, and carelessness of bearing. It is no question of becoming studied or affected or constrained. Yet you must remember to feel that you are under the eye and in the presence of God, and that you ought to show yourselves worthy of such a Father.

And be calm, pray, be very calm ! Do not excite nor enervate yourselves ; do not be turbulent. Do not throw yourselves into states of feverish activity. Do not give yourselves up to those electric shocks of energy which exhaust you yourselves and are so wearying to others ; do not give way to those constant movements and oscillations which tire you, body and soul, and exhaust those about you.

Let the feeling of God who lives in you keep you in peace and tranquillity within and without. This will be a great blessing to you and to everyone.

Let serenity reign on your countenance ! Let no cloud of worldly sadness, of egotism or personal preoccupation, darken your face, contract your lips and trouble your glance ! Learn to smile, even when you would sooner cry ! May the inward peace be outwardly reflected in a sweet and gentle harmony !

Let your modesty be seen by all ! Keep watch over your eyes, your hands, your whole person, your manner of dressing, of holding yourself, of sitting, of walking, of speaking. Avoid raising your voice, avoid a rude or cutting tone. Do not try to shine or to make yourself conspicuous. Clothe yourself in modesty, humility, reserve, and simplicity.

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Finally and above all, let your outer self express kindness ! Let your glance be gentle and indulgent ! Let your lips breathe affability and benevolence ! No ill-humour, no coolness even. Be accessible and pleasing. Let nothing in you repel or keep others at a distance ! Let no one ever see that they bore or fatigue you ! Be agreeable to everyone, and treat all with graciousness.

What cannot you do in the world when you wish to be amiable and to please ! What incalculable resources you then dispose of ! And how all the powers of your nature awaken of themselves and come into play ! All these gifts come to you from God ; instead of turning them against Him, use them for His glory. Be kindly and pleasing ; it is an excellent way of being good.

Since you carry Jesus within you, and since He wishes to manifest Himself outwardly through you, does it not wrong Him, and, as St. Paul says, " keep charity captive in injustice," if you do not show goodness to all ? May Jesus, living in you, see by your eyes ; may He speak by your lips ; may He work by your hands ; may He love by your heart ; may He appear, in short, to all those who see you and draw near to you in the soft radiance of His divine goodness !

Then you will edify your neighbour ; for your neighbour knows you only by your outward self, and can only judge you by what he sees and hears of you. Then you will be to him what the apostle so aptly calls " the sweet odour of Christ." The fragrance of your virtues will attract many souls and will do much good. " Bearing God in your bodies," as the apostle

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says again, "you will glorify Him." You will preach the Gospel in the most attractive and most efficacious manner, because you will make Jesus manifest.

There is the day of a communicant ! Oh, live the day of your communion, and the morrow too, and the days following in the memory of the communion made, or in preparation for the communion to come !

These days of communion pass so quickly ! But the fruits which they bear will not pass away. And there is a communion which will not pass away—the communion without shadow, face to face ; no longer in labour, in suffering and effort, but in the full vision and in admissible possession, in the joy without flaw, that nothing can ever take from you.

Ah, never forget that it is the communion here below that prepares you for the communion on high, as the tree prepares its fruit ; and that the communion of heaven will bring you for eternity a degree of bliss that will be in proportion to the fidelity, the generous effort, the sincere and genuine love, that you have brought to communion on earth ; to the courageous desire to make Christ live within you and to manifest Him round about you !

CHAPTER XII

DAILY COMMUNION

“ Give us this day our daily bread.”—*St. Luke xi. 3.*

SINCE Holy Communion is pre-eminent among all the gifts of God, since its effects are incomparable in as much as they glorify the Holy Trinity, succour the Church Militant, relieve the Church enduring, and sanctify your souls, ought you not to desire frequent communion with all your hearts, and endeavour to approach the holy table as frequently as possible ?

Such is, of course, the natural conclusion to be drawn from the preceding chapters. And as this question is the most important of all from a practical point of view, is it not necessary that we should deal with it here, together with such developments as arise therefrom ?

A few years ago the doctrine of the Church on this point appeared still a little unsettled, as it had never been determined in an exact and absolute manner.

To-day it is quite otherwise, for the highest authority in the Church has lately spoken. The supreme authority of St. Peter has solved the question in terms as clear as they are formal.

The importance of the “ Decree concerning the Daily Reception of the Holy Eucharist,” dated

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November 20, 1905, is exceptional, and has definitely settled the ecclesiastical jurisprudence upon this point of greatest consequence.

In the thirteenth century the Council of Lateran prescribes to all the faithful, under penalty of serious sin, the reception of Holy Communion at least once a year.

The Council of Trent, in 1563, renewed the prescription of the Council of Lateran, without adding anything of imperative importance, although it expressed the desire, and even then most earnestly, that all the faithful should communicate every time that they attended the sacrifice of the mass.

Recently Leo XIII., in his Encyclical of 1902 on the Eucharist, expressed himself as follows: "It is above all necessary to strive to bring about a revival of the frequent reception of the Eucharist, and entirely abolish prejudices to the contrary, as well as idle fears and specious pretexts for abstaining therefrom." This was an exhortation to more and more frequent communion.

But a question of the highest gravity had for long remained open, namely, that of the requisite dispositions for the frequent and even daily reception of communion.

The greatest theologians, and even the saints themselves, were not agreed on this point. The first, thinking most of the dignity of the sacrament, were the most exacting. The second, thinking chiefly of the needs of the soul, were more liberal.

But now the most liberal, such as St. Francis of Sales and St. Alphonsus Liguori, have been surpassed. Pius X. ordered the Congregation of

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the Council to assemble in order to examine and resolve this question; and he himself, with his sovereign authority, sanctioned and confirmed the decision of the most eminent cardinals, prohibiting, moreover, all discussion on the subject for the future.

The question is thus irrevocably settled, and for every Catholic the rules laid down by the sovereign Pontiff are definitive and unchangeable. The decree is at once disciplinary and doctrinal; and although it is not invested with the formal seal of infallibility, it none the less imposes itself upon the conscience of all the faithful; it demands an intellectual and inward adhesion which no one could refuse without committing the sin of temerity.

Now, this is the sense of the decree of December 20, 1905. In the first place it contains a most pressing exhortation addressed to all the faithful, without any exception of age or condition, to approach the holy table every day. In the second place it very clearly states the only two conditions required for daily communion, namely, the state of grace and an upright intention.

This decree was immediately followed, within the space of two years, by six other pontifical documents dealing with the same subject, intended still further to confirm and determine it.

Pius X., in his first decree, conscious of the inveterate and tenacious prejudices he was about to encounter, desired, although that was not necessary, to give still more force to his decision by expounding its motives. "These wishes," he says, "are in conformity with the desires which actuated our Lord Jesus Christ,

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when He instituted this divine sacrament." And the decree proves this by citing the words of Jesus, which compared the Eucharist to the manna by which the Hebrews were nourished day by day, and which He also called the living bread, and in the "Pater" the daily bread.

The decree of 1905 also recalls the wish, clearly expressed, of the Council of Trent, "that at each mass the faithful there present shall receive in reality the eucharistic sacrament."

The decree cites the examples of the Christians of the early centuries (s.v.). It deplors the falling away of piety which followed at a later date; it speaks with sorrow of the poison of Jansenism; finally, it praises and exalts all those who have reacted against this perfidious and detestable error, and have restored to honour the custom of frequent communion.

This decree was received with enthusiasm by bishops and cardinals, the greatest personages of the Church.

Cardinal Vives wrote to his representative at the Eucharistic Congress of London: "This document fills the Church Militant, Enduring, and Triumphant with joy, and Hell with rage. I will say, without fear of error, that since the Council of Trent and the revelations of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to the most blessed Margaret Mary, it is the greatest mercy our Saviour has vouchsafed our Holy Mother the Church."*

* The Cardinal added: If, in the words of the venerated Mgr. de Ségur, "the devoted love of the Pope, devotion to the most Blessed Virgin, and the cult of the most holy Sacrament are the 'three roses of the elect,' we see that while God has confirmed in the hearts of the faithful the

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Thus the faithful should welcome the words of the Pope relating to daily communion not merely with absolute and unreserved and wholly filial submission, but with immense joy and an overflowing wealth of love and gratitude.

Two conditions only are requisite in order to communicate every day: to be in a state of grace, and to have an upright intention. To a Christian, is anything more easy? Is there anything more within the reach of all?

You must be in a state of grace: that does not mean you must never commit a mortal sin. But it means that you must have obtained pardon before communion.

One may be violently tempted, exposed to the most dangerous conditions, or one may be the victim of long-standing habits; one may, in fact, still fall into sin, into mortal sin, even frequently. Yet if one repent sincerely each time and receive absolution one may communicate each day. To be surprised or scandalised at this is to set oneself up against the decree.

To have an upright intention: what does that mean? Does it mean that you must never perform any action except from supernatural

love of the Pope by the proclamation of the dogma of infallibility, and the love of the most Blessed Virgin by the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, He has also crowned the love of souls for Jesus in the Eucharist by the proclamation and solemn claim of the rights of Jesus to enter each day into the hearts of His children, and their right to nourish themselves each day on the bread of the Angels, to take their place each day at the sacred banquet, and to live each day with Him and in Him, while awaiting the day when they will see Him face to face in heaven."

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intentions? By no means. It means only that you must have an upright intention at the moment of communion.

In what does this intention consist? The decree itself tells you. It "consists in approaching the holy table not from habit, or from vanity, or for human reasons, but to satisfy the will of God, to unite oneself more closely to Him by charity, and, thanks to this divine remedy, to combat one's faults and infirmities."

Is an upright intention compatible with venial sins committed deliberately and even with affection for those sins? Yes.

Certainly it is greatly to be desired, in order to increase the fruits of communion, that one should detach oneself, before communicating, at least from all affection for venial sin, and also that one should relapse into deliberate venial sin as seldom as possible. But this is not necessarily required of those that communicate daily. Read the decree: "Although it is very desirable that those who make use of frequent and daily communion should be exempt from venial sin, at least from fully deliberate sin, and that they should have no affection for it, it is nevertheless sufficient that they should have no mortal fault, with a firm intention not to sin in future."

And that no one shall be scandalised by its liberality and indulgence the decree adds: "Given this firm and sincere intention of the soul, it is impossible that those who communicate daily should not also correct themselves of these venial sins, and, little by little, of their affection for these sins."

If an upright intention does not exclude

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deliberate venial sins, nor even the affection for these sins, then what does it exact? What constitutes upright intention? The decree tells us: "The desire to please God, to unite oneself to Him, to struggle with one's faults." In two words, an upright intention is that which refers to God and the welfare of the soul.

Besides, there is no question of the intensity of this intention, nor of its strength; it is enough that it should exist in any degree whatever.

But if you go to communion from habit, from vanity, for human reasons, does your intention cease to be upright? Yes, according to the decree, if it is these motives alone which lead you to the holy table. If, on the other hand, these bad or at least indifferent motives are joined to others truly supernatural, the intention, although more or less vitiated and tainted, may yet remain upright and allow you to communicate with profit, although the profit will be so much the less.

Lastly, if the communicant really had no upright intention, yet was in the state of grace, he would not, properly speaking, commit sacrilege by communicating; but evidently he would do wrong to communicate every day, for in so doing he would disobey the instructions of the decree.

The decree requires the state of grace and an upright intention in daily communicants; nothing less, but nothing more. The advice of the confessor even is not rigorously demanded. The decree says, "that the advice of the confessor is necessary in order that daily or frequent communion may be made with greater prudence and merit." But it immediately adds: "Let

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confessors beware of deterring whosoever shall present himself in a state of grace and with upright intention from frequent or daily communion !” And it insists: “ Confessors and preachers should by frequent exhortations and with great solicitude lead the Christian peoples to so pious and salutary a practice.”

The thought of the sovereign Pontiff is obvious. He wishes all the faithful, without exception, if they are in a state of grace and uprightness of intention, to communicate every day. Now, if such is the definite will of the Pope, such is also the will of the Church, the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, the will of God. There is no room for further discussion nor for argument; we can only submit in heart and mind and obey. We have only to open our hearts in a transport of gratitude and love, and to cry: “ O my God, how good Thou art ! And how ungrateful and guilty should I be if I were not desirous of responding to so many favours, and of approaching Thee in order to receive Thee as often as Thou dost ask it of me !”

CHAPTER XIII

OBJECTIONS TO DAILY COMMUNION

“ O salutary host ! ”

WHY should such a doctrine, all love and mercy, full of such pressing appeals, encounter an active resistance in a great number of minds? Why is it that a host of objections are raised the moment one speaks to the faithful of daily communion?

These objections, whatever they be, are refuted beforehand by all that we have been saying. Nevertheless, as they are persistent and hinder a great many people, let us take them one by one the better to do justice to them, to strip them of all credit, and show their inanity.

Considering above all the grandeur of the sacrament and of the person of our Lord, there are some who say: “ I am not worthy to communicate so often.”

This first objection is at once false and true. True in the principle which it sets forth, false in the conclusion drawn therefrom.

Truly you are not worthy to communicate; neither were the greatest of the saints worthy. The apostles were not worthy. And the Church wishes you to be penetrated by the sense of your unworthiness, since she makes you say, before communion: “ Domine, non sum dignus.”

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Does it follow from this that you ought not to communicate, at any rate not every day? This is your conclusion, and it is also your error.

In the first place, each communion augmenting within you the store of sanctifying grace and tending to complete your transformation in God, each communion renders you less unworthy of communicating. Whence it follows that those who communicate only once a month, and still more those who communicate only once a year, are far less worthy to communicate than those who do so every day. If we are to consider the question of worthiness, we must reverse the argument, and say: "I will communicate every day, so that each time I may become less unworthy of communion."

But the question of worthiness must not be considered, since God does not wish it. And the will of God must prevail over all your vain fears and false pretexts. Our Lord did not institute the Eucharist as a reward and a privilege, but as a nourishment and a remedy. You do not eat because you are strong, but to become so. You do not take a remedy because you are well, but to recover health. Similarly, God urges you to communicate not because you are holy, but that you may become holy; not because you are exempt from spiritual infirmities, but to cure you of them. Communion is not a prize merited by fervent souls, but the means given to all that they may acquire fervour.

As for the question of respect for our Lord and the honour we owe Him, you will honour Him more and show Him more respect by casting yourself with humility into His arms

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full of confidence and love, than by withdrawing yourself from Him through a feeling of false fear. This is why St. Cyril of Alexandria said: "Take care: this pretended respect is only a snare of the devil's, who seeks to turn you from your only Saviour, from Him who alone can cure your maladies."

What would you think of a child who, having caused its mother much sorrow, and wishing to prove its repentance, should fear to approach her, and should flee from her glance and embrace? Would not the child who should throw itself impulsively into its mother's arms, upon her breast, love her a hundred times more and please her infinitely better?

Our Lord, in the holy sacrament, is the father and the mother of our souls. He wishes to possess them, to fill them with His gifts and His love. The more feeble, suffering, and infirm our souls, the greater His desire to strengthen them, to heal them, to fill them with His graces. Let there be question for you of nothing else than to respond to the pressing desire of your divine Saviour, and to give Him love for love in daily communion!

Are you assailed by temptations? Where will you find the strength to resist if not in communion? The more you are tempted the more important it is that you should receive communion each day.

Are you weak, imperfect, languishing? Go to Him who is strength, perfection and life! It was for you that communion was instituted! The Master says, in the Gospel, to His followers, that they are to bring "the poor and the lowly, the halt and the blind," and make them enter

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the banquet-room. It is to you that these words are addressed.

Do you fall frequently into venial sin? "Communion," says the Council of Trent, "is the antidote which delivers us from our venial faults." "It is because you sin every day," says St. Ambrose, "that you ought to communicate every day."

Do you ever—perhaps often—fall into mortal sin? Provided you have obtained pardon by sincere contrition and absolution, communicate daily; for, says the Council of Trent once again, "communion preserves us from mortal sins."

So no objection based upon your unworthiness, your moral poverty, your temptations, or your sins even, is admissible. Each objection really becomes an argument in favour of daily communion, since its very object is to deliver you from your spiritual infirmities and your sins.

And now, do you hunger for justice—I use the word as in the Gospels—hunger for perfection, for holiness, for divine union, for total transformation in God? Where will you find a means more efficacious and more prompt, and more necessary, too, for the realisation of your desire, than in daily communion? Would you by any chance have the presumption to attempt to accomplish this great work by your own strength? A proud, indefensible pretension, which would result in your downfall!

Can you climb the highest mountain at a stride? It is more impossible still to climb the hill of the Lord which is called holiness! God alone can lead you thither; Jesus alone can carry you.

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Let Him take you, then, and again each day, since you are always slipping from Him by reason of your imperfections, which are still so many, and perhaps your faults and your sins as well.

It is by dint of coming into you that Jesus will succeed in transforming you into Himself. St. Francis of Sales says that the hares, in certain countries, by eating the snow in winter, grow perfectly white; true or false, this comparison is a real image of what will pass within you. By eating the bread of innocence, of purity, of holiness, of the divine life, you will become wholly pure, wholly saintly, wholly divine !

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You insist; you say: "Still, I ought to profit by such great graces. But I make no progress; I am always the same. Is not this an abuse of grace?"

I reply: Are you, in the first place, perfectly sure that you are no better? Children eat every day, often greedily, but they do not see themselves grow. They only perceive their growth at intervals, when they measure themselves. Save in rare cases, spiritual progress is slow and invisible. God is pleased, moreover, to hide such progress from souls, to keep them in humility; and very often those are making the most progress who least suspect it.

There may be progress in one thing and backsliding in another. There may be progress although your faults grow no less, or even perhaps increase; for example, if occasion and temptation become more frequent.

It may also happen that the soul, growing more clear-sighted—which is progress—dis-

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covers more faults than of old, although those faults have not really grown more numerous.

The question of spiritual progress as it appears in the sight of God, the only true judge of such matters, is so delicate and complex a matter that we must not lightly pronounce upon it, and above all we must beware of concluding: "Henceforth I will communicate less often."

And if by misfortune it were true that daily communion had done nothing for the progress of your soul, it would certainly be deplorable, and it might be that the sacrament had been misused. But the conclusion to be drawn would most certainly not be: "I shall not communicate so often," but: "I will communicate better in future, and still oftener if I can." For a fervent communion is the best manner of making amends for a lukewarm communion, as good digestion only can compensate for the energy lost by bad digestion.

Moreover, let us make haste to say, in the very words of the decree: "Given the state of grace and upright intention, it is impossible that those who communicate every day should not correct both venial sins and, little by little, their affection for those sins," and it is therefore impossible that they should not become better.

Perhaps you return to the charge, adding: "At least, if daily communion is to profit the soul, I must go to it with the dispositions required. Now, I have not these dispositions. I feel neither the attraction, nor the fervour, nor the necessary will to communicate."

Be careful not to confound desirable dispositions with essential dispositions. The only

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essential dispositions for daily communion to be profitable, declares the Pope, are the state of grace and upright intention. If you have these two dispositions communicate without hesitation; your communion will profit you, you may be sure of it.

Evidently—and the decree makes the observation—the effect of communion will be greater in proportion as your dispositions are more perfect. And you cannot pay too much attention to this most important point. If you were to conclude, from the facilities and encouragement given by the Pope, that you can limit yourself to the indispensable, and that it is useless to prepare yourself further, you will fall into a strange and dangerous error, and will be in opposition to the desires of the Holy Father.

But you will equally misunderstand his wishes if, under the pretext that your dispositions are imperfect or insufficient, you stay away from daily communion, being in a state of grace and upright intention.

Let your dispositions be as perfect as possible, but be very sure that daily communion, made under the two conditions named in the decree, is the best means of improving more and more those dispositions.

You say: "I feel neither attraction nor fervour." Remember the plain teaching of all the theologians, that neither sensible attraction nor sensible fervour is necessary, and that the only fervour and the only attraction required reside in the will. Insomuch as you say: "I wish to communicate in order to please God and to improve myself," you thereby give proof of the truest and most substantial fervour,

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above all if you have some external obstacle to overcome, or some natural repugnance to conquer. The effort which you make to communicate none the less is then the most certain sign and the best guarantee of your good dispositions and the generosity of your heart.

And if you object: "But I have not this will," I should reply: "Force yourself to have it. You can stimulate it by suitable reading, by meditation, or, above all, by prayer, by asking God to give you the grace to will."

In conclusion, you have always to turn to the acts of the will, to personal efforts. But do not forget that these acts and efforts are aided and sustained by God, and even forestalled and anticipated by Him. God, who wishes to see you communicate daily, acts upon your liberty to induce you to do so, before even you think to ask Him for His grace. It is enough to listen to this inward appeal of God and to respond to it. It is enough to allow yourself to be upborne by the Holy Spirit and to refrain from resisting the instances of the divine Saviour, who repeats to you unceasingly, with all His heart and all His tenderness: "Come, My friends, eat, drink, and be glad, My well-beloved!" Is this too difficult? And who can complain of or blame any but himself if he has not the good-will requisite for daily communion?

Another objection, apparently convincing but in reality as weak as the rest, is this: "I fear the routine. That is to say, I am afraid the habit of communicating may result in communions of less value. I prefer to communicate less frequently in order to communicate better."

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This objection includes a great error and a little truth. The great error is to pretend that one does less well what one does often. Does not experience give the lie direct to this assertion, proving, on the contrary, that one constantly improves in what one does often?

It is so with mental exercises as with those of the body. Habit makes us skilled, that is, apt to do well. One might cite innumerable examples.

This remark is equally true of communion. Who communicates the better: he who does so once a year only, or he who does so every month or every week? Watch them in church and in life, and you will see the difference.

“How!” said St. Francis of Sales, “can we learn to receive Jesus Christ well except by receiving Him, as we learn to do all things well by dint of doing them?” He added: “One does well only what one does often; and the best workmen are those who practise the most.”

“The more you communicate,” observes the venerable Father de la Colombière, “the better you will be disposed to profit by your subsequent communions.” “The Communion of to-day,” writes Cornelius a Lapide, “is the best preparation for the communion of to-morrow; and it is with communion as with prayer; the more we pray the better we know how to pray.”

Quotations could be multiplied. To what end? Is it not plainly obvious that even when we communicate well—it is Mgr. de Ségur who speaks—we can never communicate too often? Now, when we communicate with the two dis-

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positions demanded by the Pope we communicate well.

Then what happens? We become habituated to communion, in the best sense of the word; that is to say, we can no longer do without it. We are nourished each day by communion, and we live thereby, according to the plainly expressed desire of our Saviour. Hardly have we communicated but we desire to do so again, and so continually. We enter into a sweet and tender intimacy with Jesus, such as we form in the course of our lives with those we call our bosom friends, those whom we love more than all the rest, whose presence is our greatest joy and sweetest consolation. The "Imitation" speaks in enthusiastic terms of familiarity with Jesus as of a supreme blessing. What better means is there of attaining to that intimacy than that of daily communion?

Does this mean that you must necessarily always experience sensible joy and consolation? No. It is possible that the habit of communion may blunt your first sensibility, and that after a time your daily communions will produce upon you less effect, as you often express it, than more occasional communions. But it is sentiment and effect that you seek in communion? And do you think you will communicate less well because in so doing you may find less consolation, less sensible pleasure?

If you think this you must be undeceived, for you are making a dangerous mistake. Communion is made principally to give us the strength of humility, of sacrifice, of devotion, of courage to practise virtue; its aim is to attach the soul

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more firmly to duty and to God. Sensible consolations and joys are only accessory; it is in no wise by them that you must measure the fruits of communion.

If it did happen, in fact, in consequence of daily communion, habit was leading you to communicate less well—and it might be so—this is the little truth contained in the objection: what conclusion ought you to draw, and what ought you to do?

Ought you to conclude that you should abandon the practice of daily communion? No, the remedy would be worse than the evil.

No; but you must search for the causes which have led to your communicating less well, in order to remove them. Have you neglected your preparation or your thanksgiving? Be more careful henceforth. Have you responded languidly to the graces received? In future make the efforts that these graces demand. Have you sought in your communions for happiness, for consolation instead of for strength? In future, communicate to grow stronger, not to be happier. Have your intentions, upright at first, swerved a little? Rectify them, purify them, make them more supernatural.

But beware of diminishing the number of your communions, under the erroneous pretext that you will profit the more thereby. It may seem so to you, but it is an error. "He who eats rarely," says St. Alphonsus Liguori, "eats with more appetite; but he is far from being as strong as he who eats his meals regularly."

And even if you were to communicate less well by communicating daily than if you were to communicate more rarely, it would still be

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to your advantage to remain faithful to your daily communion, provided your intentions continued upright.

The terms of the decree, in fact, assume that Christians who are very far from fervent will communicate daily; and it encourages them to this pious practice, in spite of all, provided they have this minimum of the state of grace and of upright intention. The sacrament received each day under these conditions compensates largely, by its own effect, for what more perfect personal dispositions might add to less frequent communions.

In other words, take two Christians, of whom one communicated daily with sufficient dispositions, and the other once a week only but with more perfect dispositions, which would profit the more? The former; at least, unless there were a great disproportion between the dispositions of these two persons; for the former might perhaps receive in one single communion as many graces as the other would receive in several.

To sum up. The reasons against the practice of daily communion based upon the inconveniences of routine are detestable; they are only a false pretext which serves to cover laziness and carelessness, and dispenses with the effort necessary for daily communion.

There are some who are frank in their admission, and who say openly: "To communicate every day would impose too great a restraint upon me, it would mean too great an effort; I have not the courage."

What are we to reply? That they are wrong, to be sure, and that they ought to blush for their cowardice and ingratitude; that they ought

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to love a God so prodigal of His love with more generosity.

But if they are not convinced and persuaded, if they remain indolent and incapable of magnanimous resolution, must they abandon daily communion?

On the contrary. Those have most need of the physician who are in worst health. Those have most need to be strengthened who are weakest. Provided they are in a state of grace and upright intention they should communicate daily with confidence; and gradually courage will come to them, their strength will increase, and generosity will spring up in their souls. What used to seem difficult or impossible to them will seem possible, even easy. That which they found bitter they will find sweet. Daily communion will have produced in them this prodigy of moral transformation. Jesus, "the strength of martyrs," will communicate to them with His flesh and blood, with His life and divinity, an unparalleled courage and a strength which will surprise them. Is it not one of the principal purposes of communion to sustain the soul? And would it not be a dangerous sophism to demand, as a condition of communion, the very effect and result of communion itself?

Without doubt, to communicate every day imposes a restraint upon you. But this very restraint, which seemed so impossible before you had communicated, will become easy to you when you return from the holy table, because you will have Jesus in you, and He will bear the cross for you.

Moreover, do not exaggerate this restraint.

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You are not obliged, because you have communicated, to accomplish heroic acts or extraordinary mortifications. Communion does not create new duties for you; but it does help you to accomplish your ordinary duties well. The restraint in question is obligatory for all Christians, and without communion it is far more difficult. Communion does not make your burden heavier; on the contrary, it lightens it.

Neither does it prevent the enjoyment of legitimate joys and pleasures. "On the day I have received Holy Communion," says St. Francis de Sales, "I do not deprive myself of a single honest recreation." Communion even makes permitted joys the sweeter, since we taste them in company with Jesus, and it gives us fresh and far greater joys. "Only he who has experienced it," says St. Thomas, "can speak of the happiness that the visit of Jesus brings."

Will you still speak of restraint where all is sweetness, joy, peace, light, strength, courage, outpouring of the heart, and ineffable delight?

Some draw attention to the multiplicity of their social obligations and family responsibilities, and meet the pressing appeal of the sovereign Pontiff by the reply that they have no time to communicate daily.

For some, to be sure, the practice of daily communion is really impossible; there are real obstacles, either physical or moral. Some are deterred by their health; others by their husbands or children; others by matters of business.

If the obstacle to daily communion is insur-

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mountable such persons must not be discouraged. Let them firmly believe that God will give them, by other means, the graces that are needful. But let them at least make a spiritual communion every day, since that is always possible to everyone ! Let them entertain and stimulate within themselves an ever-increasing and sacred longing for the bread of life ! Let them finally do their utmost to communicate as often as they can !

But how many people put forward this pretext of lack of time insincerely ! How many lose hours in frivolous reading, the enjoyment of dangerous plays, idle and worldly conversation, occupations full of vanity, useless shopping, and a host of similar matters ! How many do not understand how to organise their days, to regulate their affairs, and lead lives of caprice and disorder ! How many, if they knew how and chose to exert themselves, could find time to communicate every day, or at least very frequently !

Jesus did not institute the Eucharist for persons of leisure only ; but for all the faithful, and above all for those who labour and whose lives are full.

Do you give up your meals on the pretext that you have no time ? The busiest people eat like others ; they only do so a little more quickly.

If you have but little time give less to communion, but nevertheless communicate. The decree observes that preparation and thanksgiving must depend on the " strength, condition, and duties of each."

So do not say: " I will not communicate

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every day, because I could not give enough time to my preparation and thanksgiving." Give what time you can and communicate confidently. The decree invites you to do so.

If your life is very busy, overburdened even, is not this one reason the more for going to Him who said: "Come to Me, all ye that are heavy laden, and I will relieve you"? meaning literally, "I will revive you; I will restore you to strength."

Therefore, concludes St. Francis of Sales, "those who are not very occupied should communicate often, since they have the opportunity; and those who are very occupied, because they have the need."

Others plead their situation. They are married, and ask if the duties of a wife are compatible with daily communion. And then will the husband not be vexed or alienated if he sees his wife communicating too often? Perhaps he may even definitely forbid it?

What are we to say to these objections?

To begin with, there is nothing in the duties of a wife, when legitimately fulfilled, opposed to daily communion. "In the ancient Church," says St. Francis of Sales, "young married people used to communicate every day." That having been said once, let it suffice you that it is the truth.* At most, and as a simple counsel of perfection, one might invite a wife to observe

* In 1587 the Holy Congregation of the Council declared that for young married people communion must not be limited to a few days in the week; that far from dissuading such from frequent communions, they should be urged to communicate often.

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certain mortifications, or deprivations, provided her husband had not to suffer thereby.

If a husband does not fulfil his duty, then provided the wife fulfils hers in the measure depending upon her, she ought not to deprive herself of daily communion.

If a husband is displeased by the too frequent devotions of his wife, the latter will employ gentleness and tact, and will make useful and timely concessions. But she will also strive to be firm and skilful in maintaining her rights, and will not readily sacrifice the interests of her soul, which are also the interests of her husband and her children.

She will apply herself so diligently to her communions that she will turn them to the profit of her husband, and will make him feel that it is entirely to his advantage to leave her full liberty in the fulfilment of her religious duties.

There might arise certain cases in which a wife would be wise to renounce very frequent communions, at least momentarily. But if she is fervent and adaptable it will be possible, God helping, to render habitual a number of pious practices as well as frequent communions.

The advice of the confessor will be of great assistance in enabling a Christian woman to reconcile the rights of her conscience and the needs of her soul with the demands of her husband, her children, and her household.

One sometimes hears this remark: "If I communicate so often I am afraid of scandalising my neighbour."

Without doubt you should strive to edify your neighbour, the more so if you go fre-

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quently to communion. If on returning from the holy table you give way to all your faults of character, you do harm to those about you, above all, if these have little faith or none, and are tempted to conclude that communion, producing no effect, cannot be divine. And here we cannot sufficiently warn all who have the happiness to communicate often of their responsibility in the matter of setting a good example and the effect which they produce on their neighbour.

But is this a reason for communicating less frequently? On the contrary, for the truly effectual method of correcting your character and edifying your neighbour is precisely to communicate often. Is there anything more difficult to correct than the character? Now, to succeed, there is no means approaching that of daily communion.

If your husband does not see you change all at once, he will at least remark and feel the efforts you are making; he will refer them to their source, and often, unknown to you and without telling you, he will be edified. He may perhaps reproach you. He may say: "What is the good of communicating?" And in his secret conscience he will do you the justice that his self-esteem will deny you openly.

If, moreover, you make real efforts, yet without succeeding, or without succeeding noticeably, so that, in spite of all, your husband is scandalised, you will not be responsible. And God will reward your frequent communions by graces conferred upon your husband because of them, which will compensate, and far more

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than compensate, for the injury his soul may have suffered from your actions.

Go, therefore, to the holy table each day fearlessly, and earnestly ask our Lord for the grace to conquer yourself, to become gentle, good and devoted, and believe confidently that God will bless and reward your piety and your efforts.

If you see about you virtuous, Christian, charitable, and edifying people, who none the less communicate rarely, do not let this consideration deter you either. If they communicated more frequently they would be far better still; perhaps they would even become saints. And who knows but your example may have a salutary influence upon them—may persuade them in their turn to communicate daily? What grace and merit would be yours could you lead them to do so!

And if you find yourself in surroundings where frequent communion is not observed—if you alone, among several families or in an entire village, have the habit of daily communion, do not abandon your pious habits for that.

Do not say: "I should look as if I wanted to teach the others a lesson. What would they think? That I wanted to make myself conspicuous!" Reject such ideas unhesitatingly. Be sure they do not come from God, but from the devil. Take no account of them and communicate as you ordinarily do. Strive simply to be the most humble, most modest, most simple, most charitable, most anxious to please; in short, the best. Then your actions will have pleaded the cause of frequent communion better than any words could do it. And if your example were only followed by a single soul,

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that would be enough to reward you for your courage and fidelity.

Another objection to frequent communion is sometimes put forward by persons of tender conscience. They say: "But I am responsible for my communions, and that frightens me. So I will diminish the number of my communions, that my responsibility may be less heavy."

It is true that you are responsible for your communions, and that God will call you to account for them. If you dared to communicate without being in a state of grace you would be very seriously guilty. "He who eats and drinks unworthily," says St. Paul, "eats and drinks his judgment." Sacrilege is a dreadful crime.

But if you communicate in a state of grace and with an upright intention you have nothing to fear. The Pope approves, therefore God approves. The fruit you receive from your communions will be in proportion to the perfection of your dispositions; but it will always be sufficient fully to redeem your responsibility. In communicating with the dispositions demanded by the decree you have everything to gain and nothing to lose.

On the other hand, if you diminish the number of your communions upon false pretexts you become responsible for those that you could have made and did not. Have you thought of that?

Certainly the mere fact of missing a communion is not a sin, even a venial sin. But by neglecting to make certain communions through your own fault you deprive God of the glory you would have given Him, you deprive your neighbour of the graces you would have obtained

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for him, and you defraud yourself of the gifts that you would have received. Is not this a responsibility the mere thought of which should suffice to urge you to communicate every day ?

In the hour of your death, at the moment of appearing before God, all the communions that you have made in a state of grace and with an upright intention will be there, if I may so express myself, to assist you to plead your cause, to implore grace and mercy in your favour from the sovereign Judge. Oh, how you will then regret your negligence, your vain fears and all the false pretexts and sophisms that have kept you from the holy table !

And if, now that your objections are refuted and you have been reminded of the exhortations of the sovereign Pontiff, you need yet other reasons to convince you of the necessity of frequent communion, remember that the mass is a sacrifice, the sacrifice pre-eminent above all others.

Even in ancient times, in the religions practised formerly, those present never failed to participate in the sacrifice by the consumption of a part of the victim.

Still more, then, under the new law you do not participate fully in the sacrifice of the Eucharist but by means of communion, which is the real and spiritual manducation of the Lamb sacrificed for our salvation. It was for this reason that the Council of Trent expressed the urgent desire to see the faithful communicate at mass every time they attended it. In the mind of the Church, which is that of our Lord, communion is the natural and logical completion of attendance at mass, and he who hears mass

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without communicating participates only in an imperfect manner in the august sacrifice.

Mass every day; communion every day; such should be the most ardent desire of every Christian. Happy are those who do their utmost to attain to this end ! What light, what strength, what grace they will receive during their lives ! What glory, what reward after their death, for all eternity !

CHAPTER XIV

DAILY COMMUNION FOR CHILDREN

"Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not."—*St. Mark* x. 14.

A LAST objection to daily communion especially affects one particular class of communicants, namely, children. Should they be admitted to daily communion? Or should this favour be reserved for those of a riper age?

The reply is given us by the Sacred Congregation of the Council. The decree of September 20, 1905, expressed itself thus: "Frequent and daily communion should be encouraged in all Christian schools."

Another reply from the Congregation dated September 15, 1906, is more definite still: "Frequent communion must be recommended even to children. Once admitted to the holy table they should no longer be prevented, but should much rather be encouraged to participate frequently. The contrary practice, on whatever grounds, is condemned."

Finally, an instruction to the members of the Sacerdotal Eucharistic League, approved by Pius X. on July 27, 1906, contains these words: "They (the priests), when preparing children for Holy Communion, will take especial care to awaken a keen desire for daily

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communion in these pure hearts, devoid of all vain fears. Let them see that they make their first communion as soon as they are capable, and they should have them renew it, if possible, every day."

Thus the question has been decided with the utmost clearness, and by the highest authority, by the sovereign Pontiff. We must encourage children, from the time of their first communion, to communicate frequently, if possible every day.

Now, what is the real value of all the objections which are customarily brought against the frequent communion of children? Children, it is said, are too trifling; they do not sufficiently understand what they are about; they communicate without respect and without preparation.

The most eminent cardinals of the Sacred Congregation of the Council, who drew up the decree concerning the communion of children, and Pius X., who approved it, and who before he was Pope was for years priest and bishop, know children as well as you; and none the less they ask that they should be led to communicate very frequently.

What have you to reply to authorities so eminent and so enlightened? You confide the health of your children to your physician; will you not have confidence in those whom God has established to be the fathers of their souls and yours—in the spiritual physicians entrusted with the cure of moral infirmities and the care of supernatural health and life?

In a word, are you Catholics? If you are, give up following your own lights and your

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individual ideas in these matters, whose supreme gravity infinitely surpasses the competence of the most prudent and enlightened human understanding.

Moreover, what wise and decisive reasons might we not bring to the support of the authority of the Church! Is it not at the moment of their first communion that children are purest, most pious, most generous, most open to the inspirations of grace, and most prompt to correspond thereto? Is it not then that their nature is most adaptable, most flexible, most capable of transformation, most impressionable to the imprint we wish to leave upon them? How many mothers are no longer capable of making the sacrifices that their children make, under their eyes, at the time of their first communion!

Why then prevent children from going to the sources of grace at the time when they will drink the deepest draughts thereof? Why refuse them the abundance of supernatural aid at the moment when they will most largely profit thereby? Why deprive them of Jesus? He who can help them most!

Your children, your sons especially, from the age of sixteen or eighteen years, are about to be assailed by the most treacherous and often the most violent temptations. Evil, which is more conspicuous than ever, with an unprecedented effrontery and audacity, is about to assail them and to seek to enter their souls by force, through their eyes, their ears, and all their senses. A terrible struggle is about to commence. The majority succumb. Those who were yesterday living are now in reality dead.

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The Christians of yesterday have become indifferent, unbelievers, libertines.

This is the fate that awaits your sons, and perhaps your daughters ! Do you not wish to save them, to arm them for the struggle ?

What then will you do ? You will fortify their will ; you will accustom them to sacrifice ; you will enlighten and confirm their faith. Good ! But will you find a means of preservation more potent and effectual, a better weapon in the fight, than frequent communion ? And will not communion also give them energy of will, the spirit of sacrifice, purity, and courage ?

Do you not feel that a child, a young man, who, in spite of his frivolity, in spite of his faults, approaches the holy table frequently will, if he brings a state of grace and an upright intention, contract deeply-rooted habits of prayer, faith, love, and union with our Lord ; in short, the habit of the Christian life, and that he will become capable of resisting all the assaults of the passions ?

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I understand your objections. How many have acted thus in our Christian schools and colleges, and have afterwards nevertheless fallen into incredulity and misconduct !

Do not let us exaggerate. It is true that everything can be abused ; the greatest graces can be resisted ; communion, even daily communion, does not confer sinlessness.

But for a few who have turned out badly in spite of habits of piety contracted in their childhood, how many others have owed their perseverance and their salvation to these same habits ! How many have owed thereto their

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return to God—tardy, perhaps; even at the last hour, but sincere !

Again, did those who turned out badly communicate sufficiently well and sufficiently often ? If they communicated only once a week or once a fortnight it was because of this lack of frequency, perhaps, that they failed to persevere. Had their communions been daily, who will venture to say that all might not have been otherwise ?

Perhaps the lamentable change in them later was due also to the imperfection of the dispositions which they brought to communion ? If they communicated from habit, or from impulse, wishing to do as their comrades did, or from motives of human respect, is it astonishing that they did not persevere ? Children should not be urged to the holy table against their will. This would be the greatest mistake and the greatest imprudence ! Chaplains and masters of colleges should take the greatest care to avert this danger.

No ; children must be led to go to communion spontaneously, by gentleness and persuasion ; to desire Holy Communion, to feel the need of it, to appreciate its blessings, to go of their own accord, frequently, and if possible every day.

No reasonable person will deny that communions thus made constitute the best means of religious education and the most solid guarantee of perseverance. This is the formal opinion of the Congregation and the sovereign Pontiff, and it should be that of all wise and Christian parents.

Children and young people who do not communicate sufficiently often risk becoming, sooner or later, the certain prey of vice ; while

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those who communicate often and well will remain pure, or will soon regain their purity. "Suppress frequent confession and communion in the education of the young," said Don Bosco, that great and saintly teacher of youth, "and you banish morality."

So be warned, you on whom falls the first and special care of your children ! God will demand a strict account of the influence that it depended upon you to exercise upon the communions of your sons and daughters !

At Faverney, in Franche-Comté, on May 24, 1608, the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament had attracted an immense crowd. During the night a fire broke out upon the altar, among the flowers, and in a few moments had consumed everything. Only the monstrance remained intact in the midst of the flames, suspended in the air without support. And the people, hastening from all parts, were able to gaze upon it in that condition for thirty-three consecutive hours ! The flames which surrounded it were like a magnificent halo of glory.

Which of your sons, or even of your daughters, will not one day pass through the devouring fires of the passions of youth ? Where will be their help, their support, in that formidable hour ? It will not come from without, as you know well. Around them all things will only help to fan the flame, and all things will give way beneath them. Will they not be carried away in the universal ruin ? One force alone can save them, one support only remains : Jesus ! If they have made of their hearts a living monstrance, Jesus Himself will support them ; Jesus will uphold them in the midst of the flames.

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And these flames, I mean the passions, will rage in vain against these souls filled with God. In place of hurting them they will but increase their merits, they will but surround them with a halo in this life; a forerunner of the aureole which will be theirs in heaven—the aureole of purity crowned with lilies, the crown of glory.

Finally, do not say this: "We must not give children habits which they cannot continue later. At eighteen, twenty, and later it will not be possible for them to communicate daily; therefore, why let them do so now?"

Again a sophism! And truly the devil is very cunning and skilful to get you to admit such pretexts!

In the first place, can you be sure that your children will live? Many, alas, are those who leave this world before their twentieth year! And if they must appear before God in the flower of their youth, you will have deprived them of the great increase of happiness and of glory which would have been theirs for eternity had they communicated more frequently! What a responsibility for you! What a sin! What an irreparable wrong done to your children! This possibility alone should be enough to refute all your objections to frequent communion in youth!

But I will suppose that your children will grow up; they will live in the world; they will marry. Will they be able to continue their daily communions? Why should they not have that happiness?

But if, on the contrary, they encounter moral and material impossibilities which absolutely

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prevent frequent communion, will it be a bad thing that they have communicated so often before, since they no longer can now?

I have tried in vain to find where the harm lies; I cannot see it. On the contrary, I see a very great good, and I rejoice the more for those frequent communions in the past inasmuch as henceforth they will be less frequent.

Communions made are graces acquired and provisions of strength put by in reserve. The merits obtained in the past by so many communions are in no wise lost because these communions are not continued. This first result, which is without price, will remain with your children, and will be transformed, as we have already said, into a greater glory and happiness throughout eternity.

Moreover, the soul will have reached a degree of strength, growth, maturity, love, and virtue which it never would have attained with less frequent communions. It will, therefore, have greater chances of remaining fervent in its new state than another which had communicated less often.

When you make the objection that this child, when grown up, will be discouraged, having no longer the help that he formerly had, and that he will fall into negligent habits, you are again making use of a sophism.

A young man whose nourishment has always been healthful and substantial, whose health is solid and robust, because in his infancy he received every necessary physical care, will be more capable at twenty years of age of supporting fasts and exertions, than another whose health is uncertain and feeble, owing to the lack

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of care and healthful food in the past. This is evident. He may perhaps suffer more than the second, but he will support privation better, since he will have greater strength and resisting power.

In the same way, one accustomed to frequent communion, if prevented from communicating so often, will suffer in heart and piety more than one who has never had the same happiness, but will be more healthful of spirit, and stronger to remain faithful to God and reject the temptations and entanglements of life.

Thus the more you fear that in the future your children may not be able to obtain the eucharistic nourishment in sufficient plenty, the more urgent is it to give them freely of the bread of life, so as to fortify their souls, which will later be exposed to spiritual anæmia, degeneration, and death.

Let me repeat that good habits cannot be formed too early. Not to commence constitutes the greatest chance of not continuing. Habits which are not contracted in childhood may never be contracted at all, or only imperfectly at best. It is so with all habits—physical, intellectual, or moral.

The same law is true of communion. Certainly it is never too late to commence daily communion, and we see many who commence the practice only in middle life or old age. But those who have had this pious habit from childhood will always retain a marked advantage over the former, not only by reason of the graces previously acquired, but on account of an older and deeper intimacy with our divine Saviour, which will enable them to derive a

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greater profit from communion than those whose habits are of more recent formation.

Lastly, another objection is sometimes formulated against the frequent communion of children: "If they communicate so often my sons will become priests and my daughters nuns."

This objection conceals a serious misconception. It supposes that perfection, and therefore frequent communion, which should lead to perfection, are confined to the sanctuary and the cloister; while the Church affirms, with all its teachers, that those who live in the world, whether married or not, can and should aim at the degree of perfection compatible with their state.

So that to conclude that a child will become a priest or a nun because it tries courageously to become more pious is contrary to the direct teaching of the Church.

Also, the pontifical decree calls to daily communion "the Christian people: all the faithful of whatever class or condition they may be"; not priests and nuns alone, present or future.

Vocation is a particular call and a special grace, an absolutely free gift on the part of God. If your sons and daughters have not received this grace from God, if it does not enter into the purposes of His eternal wisdom to draw them to Himself, do not fear! Let them communicate every day; they will never become priests and nuns on that account, but merely Christian men and women perfect in the world.

If, on the other hand, God had called one of your children, and the call was not heard: if this vocation were lost through your fault, because you had refused your child the com-

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munion and the graces which would have enabled him to realise in his person the divine will: do you understand to what an extent you would have sinned against God and your child?

Against God, whom you would have wronged by disregarding His supreme will, His sovereign rights, and by depriving Him of the glory which a priest or a nun would have procured Him. Against your child, because you would have turned him aside from his path; you would have endangered his salvation and compromised even his earthly happiness, for no one can be truly happy apart from the path which God had marked out for them.

That Christian mothers suffer cruelly, that they feel their hearts breaking when they see their children give themselves to the sanctuary or the cloister—who will wonder at it, or fail to understand their feelings? But they ought to regard a vocation to the priesthood or the religious life as the highest honour and the greatest of graces, as well as a source of blessings, for the whole family. Above all, they should beware of opposing the divine will and resisting Him who only desires our happiness and welfare. It is permissible for a mother, it is even commanded, to test seriously the vocation of her children. But she would be committing one of the gravest of offences, grave in itself and in its consequences, were she to seek to hinder this vocation, and this would be so were she to reason thus: "I do not want my children to communicate so often, lest they should grow up to be priests or nuns."

To sum up. Every Christian must accept the pontifical documents concerning daily com-

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munion, not merely with filial submission, with respectful and confident docility, but with a deep and religious joy.

Every Christian should cry, from a heart overflowing with gratitude and love: "How good is God ! how ineffably and infinitely good ! Jesus, in His eternal and immeasurable charity, wishes of His own sovereign will to come each day into my soul in order to give Himself to me as the bread of life. Neither my spiritual imperfections nor my moral poverty nor my sins of frailty, nor even my voluntary venial sins and my affections for these sins, will dismay Him. If I am in a state of grace, and if my intention is upright, it is the supreme desire of Jesus to descend into my heart each day, expressly to cure me of my ills, to staunch my wounds and heal my sores, to restore me to health, to fortify my life, to confirm my union with Him, and finally to overwhelm me with all His graces and to pour His divinity upon me, in wave upon wave, to send it flowing into my soul to the very brim.

How can I fail to respond to this ardent desire of my God but by a like desire, by a cry of joy, by a perpetual hymn of gratitude ? How can I fail to cry: " I will sing forever the mercies of the Lord " ?

What Christian, conscious of the celestial favours and the unexampled gift which God bestows upon us in daily communion, would not wish to do her utmost to profit thereby and to enable all those falling under her influence to profit in their turn ?

Above all, what mothers could be so degenerate, so unmotherly, as to refuse their children

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this spiritual milk, this divine nourishment, this superior and ineffable life which Jesus brings to every soul, but more especially to little children whom He called unto Him, and whom He loved to have around Him ?

Oh, judgment will deal strictly with mothers in regard to their children ! What an account they will have to render ! An account of the means they have employed to form these young souls in Christian habits ! An account, more especially, of the place and the part they may have given to Holy Communion in the education of their children !

If in our days so many Christians betray or deny Jesus Christ; if so many abandon Him and remain undisturbed by religious persecution; if there are so many who shock the world by their disorderly lives and the licence of their conduct;—if this is so, is not the principal reason to be found in the absence of the habit of frequent communion during the years of the moral formation of youth ?

And if children have not communicated better and more often, whose fault is it—if not, as a rule, the parents', who have not provided either the example, the advice, nor the necessary warnings ? What a responsibility on the last day, at the hour of the supreme appearance before the Eternal Justice, from whose sight nothing can escape !

Let all mothers endeavour to lead their children to communicate often !

Let all wives, too, influence their husbands ! Let them be prudent ! A man must not communicate, to give his wife pleasure, in a state of soul which should not permit of com-

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munion, because he would not be fulfilling the two conditions demanded by the decree.

But when, on the contrary, a wife is certain that if her husband communicates he will do so well, she should encourage him, and employ all her resources of tenderness, affection, persuasion, gradually to induce him to do so.

And housewives must not urge to the holy table servants who would go thither only to escape rebuke. No; but let them facilitate, for those who are properly disposed, the practice of frequent communion. They should arrange their service accordingly, even at the cost of personal inconvenience.

And in this same spirit of zeal and prudence, those who visit the poor should strive to persuade them that communion is their greatest good.

Let friends stimulate friends in this movement of faith and love which leads each day to the holy table !

It is not rash to affirm that if frequent and daily communion were once more the general custom, if it were usual in Christian families, if parents were to urge their children to observe it from the time of their first communion, and were to preach by example, an absolute renovation of society would very shortly be accomplished. Waves of supernatural life would flow into all souls, and we should see on all hands a revival of the steadfast virtues of the Gospel in all their integrity, and of its maxims in all their purity.

We should no longer encounter the travestied and diminished Christianity which we see to-day, nor the fervours distorted by imagination and

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sentimentality, nor all the caricatures of faith and piety.

Frequent and daily communion, according to the expressions of the decree, "would augment the union with Jesus Christ, nourish the spiritual life with greater strength, embellish the soul with the most abundant virtues, and give us a still more certain pledge of eternal life." As the Church sings daily, the host would be our salvation: "O salutaris hostia!" Jesus, by daily communion, would reign in every heart, in every family, and over the whole of the human race.

Never have the social foundations—justice, morality, and charity—been more profoundly shaken than in our days; we are on the eve, perhaps, of the most terrible events, the most frightful cataclysms.

Never, then, has it been more necessary to rebuild, and above all to do so solidly. Now, what sure and stable foundation can one give to any society other than that on which God declared that He would build His church with such firmness that nothing should ever prevail against her? And is not this foundation Jesus Christ our Lord?

Let us then make haste, by the practice of daily communion, to restore the reign of Jesus upon earth, by establishing between Jesus and souls a profound and indestructible union. We can do nothing more agreeable to God, more useful for our souls, and more salutary for the world. "O salutaris hostia!"

CHAPTER XV

SPIRITUAL COMMUNION

“ If any man shall hear My voice, and open to Me the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.”—*Apocal.* iii. 20.

THESE talks on communion would not be complete if nothing were said of spiritual communion.

Now, the catechism of the Council of Trent, called also the Roman Catechism, because it is the official formulary of the Roman doctrine, uses the following words: “ The shepherds of souls should teach their flock that there is not one manner only of receiving the admirable fruits of the sacrament of the Eucharist, but that there are two: sacramental communion and spiritual communion.”

Spiritual communion is little known, and still less practised; and yet it is a special and incomparable source of graces. “ It is, by itself,” says Father Faber, “ one of the greatest powers of the world.” “ By it,” writes St. Leonard of Port-Maurice, “ many souls have attained a high perfection.”

To derive from this inestimable treasury all the wealth which it contains it must be understood: (1) in what spiritual communion consists; (2) what graces it confers; and (3) in what manner it may be practised.

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In what does spiritual communion consist ?

It is, in the first place, a communion; the Council of Trent states this expressly. It is therefore an actual participation in the graces of the Eucharist, although distinct from the sacramental participation properly so called.

We have already seen what graces flow into souls from the Eucharist; so that it is enough, in order to estimate the value of spiritual communion, to know that it does truly confer upon us a considerable proportion of those graces. We shall presently see in what measure and to what extent.

This communion is effected not externally, as in sacramental communion, but spiritually; that is, internally and mentally, without any material and corporal action; spiritually, that is, again, supernaturally or divinely.

It is also called "interior communion," communion of the heart, invisible or mystical communion, because it unites us with Jesus in a secret and mysterious manner, without a visible sign as in sacramental communion. It is also called "virtual communion," because it has the power of making us participate in the fruits of the Eucharist.

What must one do in order to communicate spiritually? Is it enough to make acts of faith and love toward Jesus present in the Eucharist? No. We must expressly formulate the desire to communicate; and in order that this desire may be sincere we must be so disposed that we could communicate sacramentally, if it were possible.

On the other hand, a simple desire, if deep and sincere, no matter how brief and rapid, is

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sufficient to constitute spiritual communion. Obviously, the longer the desire is prolonged the more fruitful is the communion. But by a simple impulse of the heart toward Jesus present in the Eucharist we communicate spiritually, we participate in the graces of sacramental communion.

How can this be? I will explain.

Our Lord is in the Eucharist for us; and His desire to come into us, to be wholly ours, to possess us, to live in us, is a supreme desire that asks only that it may satisfy itself.

"I am consumed with the desire to give Myself to thee," said our Lord to the venerable Jeanne Marie of the Cross; "and the more I give Myself the more I desire to give Myself anew. After each of thy communions I am like the pilgrim devoured with thirst, to whom a drop of water is given, and who is thereby made to thirst yet more. It is thus that I aspire continually to give Myself to thee." Jesus addresses these very words to each of you.

Jesus wishes to enter your heart every day by sacramental communion; yet even that does not suffice Him; He would come again and again, without ceasing. This divine desire is realised by spiritual communion.

"Every time thou desirest Me," He said to St. Mechtilde, "thou dost draw Me to thee. A desire, a sigh, is enough to make thee possess Me."

Our Lord has often revealed to saintly souls, and in different ways, His ardent desire to unite Himself with us.

To the blessed Margaret Mary He said: "Thy desire to receive Me has so sweetly

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touched My heart, that if I had not already instituted this sacrament I should have done so at this moment, in order to give Myself to thee."

Our Lord charged St. Margaret of Cortona to remind a monk of the word of St. Augustine: "Believe, and thou wilt have eaten;" that is to say, make an act of faith and desire towards the Eucharist, and you will be nourished by that divine food.

To the blessed Ida of Louvain, during a mass at which she could not communicate, Jesus said: "Call Me, and I will come!" "Come, O Jesus!" she cried at once, and felt herself filled with happiness as though she had really communicated.

And after a spiritual communion of which she tasted the full delight, St. Catherine of Siena heard our Lord say to her: "In such manner and place as may please Me I can, I will, I am able marvellously to satisfy the holy ardours of a soul that desires Me."

This desire of Jesus to unite Himself to us is infinite and all-powerful; it knows no other obstacle than our liberty.

Jesus has multiplied miracles in order to enclose Himself in the host that He may give Himself to us. What does it cost Him to work one miracle the more, to give Himself to us directly without the intervention of the sacrament? Is He not master of Himself, of all His graces, of His divinity? And if, being called by a few words, He descends from heaven into the host between the hands and at the will of the priest, will He not descend directly from heaven into our hearts if He is called by the ardour of our desire?

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O marvellous power of the human soul !
O power of a sincere desire, inspired by love !
Power which allows each one of you to realise
for herself, in a certain manner, what the priest
accomplishes for all the faithful !

Hagar, flying to the desert and seeing that her
child was dying of thirst, sent up a despairing cry
to heaven, and a spring of pure water welled
forth immediately to save mother and child.

Cry, therefore, to God, telling Him your desire,
and God will reply to you in causing a spring
of eternal life to well forth from His heart to
sanctify your soul !

A poor savage has no priest to baptise him,
but he sends the voice of his desire up to God:
behold him baptised ! A poor sinner turns to
God. In the midst of her confusion she lifts
her eyes towards the infinite Goodness; she
thirsts for love and forgiveness: behold, she is
forgiven !

You cannot approach the holy table; either
you have already communicated or some obstacle
prevents you. Gaze upon the host in the
tabernacle with eyes of longing; declare your
hunger and thirst to Jesus. Say to Him: "Jesus,
come; I die without Thee !" Jesus will hasten:
you will have communicated.

During mass the priest takes the host between
his hands; he recollects himself, he bows him-
self, and he speaks a few words. Immediately
the heavens open; Jesus hastens, at the voice
of His friend who calls Him: behold Him
between the hands of the priest !

And you, pious soul ! Meditate profoundly;
shape an ardent wish within your heart.
Touched and urged by this desire, Jesus will

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hasten to His well-beloved: behold Him in your heart !

O ineffable Goodness, O infinite generosity, O unbounded munificence, O bewildering love ! It is no longer God who is sovereign Master; and the creature is no longer servant. The creature becomes the sovereign mistress of God; and God makes Himself the eager and obedient servant of the creature.

“ I come not among you,” said Jesus, “ to be served, but to serve.” Spiritual communion is truly an infinite power given to the creature over the Creator, to the pious soul over Jesus ! Father Faber is right: “ Spiritual communion is one of the mightiest powers in the world !”*

How express the innumerable fruits which spiritual communion brings us ?

All is summed up when we say that it is a communion; that is, a participation in the Eucharist and the graces of sacramental communion.

The Council of Trent, speaking of the usage of the admirable sacrament of the Eucharist, distinctly states that “ some receive it spiritually: these are those who, partaking in desire of the celestial bread which is set before them, taste the fruits and the benefit of the sacrament.” Thus, according to the Council of Trent, and according to all theology, spiritual communion is a spiritual manducation of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore all that we have said of the fruits of sacramental

* However, spiritual communion must not be confounded with sacramental communion; still less must the latter be dispensed with on the pretext that the former will take its place.

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communion is also true of this, although in a different manner and in a less degree.*

The first effect of spiritual communion is therefore to increase our union with the humanity and the divinity of the Word made flesh. This is its principal effect, its essential advantage; all other graces received proceed from this. Briefly they are as follows:

Fervour is revived. "Spiritual communion," says the Curé d'Ars, "revives the soul as a bellows does the fire which is covered with ashes and about to die. When we feel the love of God growing cold, let us make hastily a spiritual communion!" Poor heart! it so easily loses its heat, so soon becomes covered with ashes! Spiritual communion revives the fire and makes the flames of fervour break forth anew.

In the midst of our trials during this pilgrimage here below sadness is forever taking possession of us; and our hearts become filled with heavy mists.

Spiritual communion dissipates this mist like the morning sun; it brings joy back to the heart and sets the soul at peace.

It also keeps us in a state of recollection; it is the best means we have to preserve us from the dissipation of our thoughts, from frivolity and all the wanderings of the spirit and imagination. It accustoms us to keep our regard fixed upon Jesus, to preserve a sweet and constant intimacy with Him, to live always heart to heart with Him.

* Our Lord one day showed the pious Paula Maresca a golden ciborium containing her sacramental communions and a silver ciborium containing her spiritual communions; He thus marked their relative value.

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It detaches us from all that is merely sensible and earthly; it makes us disdain passing vanities, the pleasures of this world, which are only for a time. "It is the bread of the heart!" said St. Augustine. "It is the healing of the heart!" It keeps the heart from all that is impure and imperfect, it transforms it and unites it closely to the heart of Jesus.

It renders our relations with Jesus more tender and familiar. It makes our devotion to Him warmer and deeper. It enables us to taste more fully the charm and sweetness of His presence. "When I make the sign of the cross," writes St. Angela of Foligno, "and place my hand on my heart, in saying 'The Son' . . . I experience a rush of love and a great tenderness, because I feel that Jesus is there."

Spiritual communion places Jesus there, in the very centre of our heart; His presence is permanent and brings us infinite happiness.

Spiritual communion has also a wonderful efficacy in effacing venial faults and remitting the penalties of sin. Pious souls who communicate spiritually often and well will be exempt from the flames of purgatory. Jesus will bear them straight from earth to heaven, as He did the soul of Joan of Arc, which was seen at the moment of her death to mount directly to paradise in the form of a pure white dove.

Spiritual communion will give to those souls which have communicated well a surprising glory in heaven. Our Lord told St. Gertrude that every time we regard the sacred host with devotion we augment our eternal happiness, preparing for ourselves blessings above in proportion as we have multiplied our desires full of

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love and longing for the Holy Eucharist here on earth.

Souls that have often communicated in spirit will shine in heaven with peculiar splendour, and will taste especial joys, sweeter and more holy than those known to others.

Spiritual communions, day by day increasing our desire to receive Jesus, urge us to sacramental communion, prevent us from missing it by our own fault or negligence, send us to communion more frequently, and dispose us to communicate better and to receive more abundant fruits therefrom. Spiritual communion is, according to the testimony of all the saints, the best preparation for sacramental communion.

Remember, too, that spiritual communion may be offered for the sake of our neighbour; either on behalf of the living or the dead.

St. Margaret Mary recommended spiritual communion on behalf of the souls in purgatory. "You will greatly comfort these poor afflicted souls," said she, "by offering spiritual communions on their behalf, in order to redeem the bad use they have made of sacramental communions."

Finally, you must understand that you receive all these benefits and graces which flow from spiritual communion according to your dispositions; that is, according to the value of your desires.

The more intense your desire to communicate, the purer, the more prolonged, the more fully will you participate in the fruits of the Eucharist and all the favours which we have enumerated; and this without other limits than the ardour, extent, and keenness of your desires.

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The saints are unanimous in exalting the marvels of spiritual communion. They go so far as to say, with the venerable Jeanne Marie of the Cross, "that God by this means often fills us with the same graces as in sacramental communion"; and with St. Gertrude and Father Rodriguez, that "sometimes the graces are still greater, for," says the latter, "although sacramental communion is in itself of a greater efficacy, yet the fervour of desire may compensate for this inequality."

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What more precious encouragement to spiritual communion could be given? How can one urge you further to make such communions frequently?

When will you make them? You will do so always during mass, when you attend without being able to communicate sacramentally. "You must," says Rodriguez, "devour the divine food with the eyes of the spirit. You must open the mouth of the soul, with an ardent desire to receive the celestial manna, and to savour its sweetness slowly in the heart."

You will make a spiritual communion, according to the advice of St. Alphonsus Liguori, at the beginning and the end of your visits to the blessed sacrament. What a wonderful manner of employing this precious time! Jesus is really there, a few paces distant, filled with the desire to come to you. Long for Him with the same ardent desire, and He will come and unite Himself to you in a consoling intimacy. You will leave the church inflamed with love.

You will make a spiritual communion in the morning, as soon as you have awakened from

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sleep. "At your awakening," said our Lord to St. Mechtilde, "long for Me with all your heart. Draw Me to you by a sigh of love, and I will come, I will perform in you all your works, and I will suffer in you all your pains."

You will communicate in spirit after your prayer, or at the end of your meditation, on finishing your spiritual reading, before or after reciting the rosary, and at night as you fall asleep.

You may communicate spiritually ten times, twenty times a day, as often as you will; for a few short moments suffice, a few words of prayer directed to Jesus present in the Eucharist imploring Him to come to you. It is not the time that signifies; it is the ardour, the vehemence of the desire, the hunger and thirst of the soul, the eagerness of the heart.

As for the formula, the best will be that which comes most spontaneously, most sincerely from the inmost recesses of your being. That in which you put the most love, and above all the most tender, pure, generous, and disinterested love; that in which you feel most sure of making Jesus feel that you love Him for Himself.

You will say to Him:

"O Jesus, come; oh, come! I have need of Thee; my soul sighs and languishes apart from Thee; I hunger and thirst after Thee; all is dreary when Thou art not here!

"O Jesus, I cannot live far from Thee; I die without Thee. O Father, Friend, O Well-beloved, come, I beg Thee, come!

O Love, Love, instil into my heart all the ardour of the seraphim and all the most radiant feelings of Thy divine Mother!

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“ O infinite Love, come Thou Thyself and love in me; come, and kindle in my heart all the most ardent desires that have consumed Thine own !

“ Above all, O Love, may I love Thee for Thyself ! May I forget myself, lose sight of myself, lose myself in Thee ! Enter into me, that I may live no longer, that Thou alone mayst live in me !

“ As Thy Father is glorified in Thee, so be Thou glorified in me ! Take all that is in me to make it Thine forever !

“ Enter into me to continue Thy works, Thy prayers, Thy virtues, Thy sufferings, Thine expiations, Thy merits !

“ O Jesus, O Well-beloved, nothing for me, but all for Thee, and forever ! Enter into me, live in me, that we may be consummated in one !”

Thus you will make your spiritual communions, or in other terms still warmer, with expressions yet more ardent. Often even you will say nothing, you will remain silent, for the lips become incapable of formulating the desires of the heart when the heart is carried away and ravished by divine love !

Then it is unspeakable suffering not to be able to express what one feels. But Jesus sees this inner suffering, and to Him it is perfect homage; it fills Him with joy, for it reveals more love than all the words and cries of the most impassioned heart.

And all these desires, all these impulses, all these feelings that Jesus Himself awakens within you, and which He feels more than you—I leave you to think whether He will not reward them.

By the ardour of their desires for spiritual

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communion, the saints have often obtained miracles. Hosts have left the hands of the priest and given themselves spontaneously to them. Angels, sometimes the Blessed Virgin, or St. John, or our Lord Himself, have appeared to them and given them the sacrament.

You will not be granted such miracles. No matter, if you do really, though invisibly, obtain the same graces.

And these graces you will receive, if you consider, on the one hand, the worth and value, the excellence and the nature of spiritual communion; and if, on the other hand, you will remember with what ease you can effect it, at any hour of the day or night.

How ungrateful then you would be, how culpable and inexcusable, if, understanding spiritual communion and the incalculable riches which it contains, you were not to resort to it, at least once a day, and much oftener still ! For of all the means of sanctification is there one which is more within your reach, more efficacious, and more marvellous ?



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